



Stranger Things in a Cabin in the Woods by **Harry Truman Wilson**

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Summary: It's summer break 1985 in Hawkins and the Wheeler parents have a surprise...a week at a summer cabin! They invite Joyce and her boys, and Nancy and Mike are each allowed one guest...Will, Mike, and his guest Lucas discover things near the cabin that aren't quite what they seem, while Jonathan, Nancy and her guest Steve become closer than anyone expected...M for Stoncy. Complete.

1. Chapter 1

Stranger Things in a Cabin in the Woods

Thanks for reading! This story is Stranger Things Fanfiction inspired by the movie Cabin in the Woods.

M is for chapter 3 and 5 (with some heavy Stoncy). There is also a bit of Will/Mike, but it's light.

Hope you enjoy!

Chapter 1: Old Relationships

"Smile bud!" Jonathan said, aiming his camera right at Will's face. The kid gave the biggest smile he could, then blinked right as the bulb flashed.

"Will, honey, you have to open your eyes for the picture..." Mom said. Mom was acting like...Mom. Worrying about him constantly, obsessing over every little thing about him...including this dinner with the Wheelers.

"Mom..." Will muttered, then pulled on the collar of his tight button up. The shirt, along with the pants and belt, were all too tight and uncomfortable, and Will wanted to get out of them as soon as possible. He grimaced as Jonathan lined up another shot, "We're gonna be late guys!"

"Alright, just one more..." Jonathan said. Mom smiled widely as Will did everything in his power to keep his eyes open.

"Perfect..." Jonathan took another, then another before Will threw his hand out.

"Stop! Stop!" Will regretted it as soon as he said it, because his mother was on him like a hawk.

"Will! Will, are you okay?" she said, grabbing his arms, "The light, is

it? Was it...the other side?"

"No!" Will said, trying to rub the brightness of the light out of his eyes, "I'm fine, Mom..."

"Okay...sorry sweetie, I just..."

"I know...you care..." Will muttered. Despite it having been near eight months since the mind flayer incident, when he was taken over by a monster from the Upside Down, his mom still harped on him over his every daydream. And he'd be lying if he said he didn't occasionally glimpse into the other side. Into that terrible, horrible Vale of Shadows.

"Alright, Byers, let's go!" Mom yelled as she grabbed her purse and keys, "Come on Will..." she started toward the door, then looked back to Jonathan. It was only then that Will noticed he was in a jean jacket and old pants.

"Jonathan, are you really going to wear that over to the Wheelers?"

"I..." Jonathan hesitated, then shook his head, "You know Mom, I'm not feeling so well...maybe I shouldn't..."

"Jonathan..." Will piped up, touching his arm, "Mike told me that you had to be there..."

"Get that nicer jacket...and grab some pants...we're leaving now!" Mom said. Jonathan sighed, then went back into his room. Will looked up at his mother.

"Mike said Jonathan and Nancy..."

"Broke up...yes sweetie. But don't say anything tonight, okay..." she sighed, then bit her lip, "I hope this is a good idea..."

"What, the dinner?" Will asked, confused.

"You'll see honey..." Mom said. After what seemed like forever, Jonathan came out in an old brown suit jacket and khakis, then they loaded into the car and went to the Wheelers. Will looked out the window as he went, thinking, and hoping. Hoping he wouldn't have

an incident at Mike's nice dinner. Everyone once in a while, when he stared too long into the sky, he thought he saw it, the horrible, huge mind flayer, towering over the Vale of Shadows. But as he stared today, he saw nothing but bright green tree leaves and felt the warmth of early summer.

When they arrived at the home and went to the door, it was Mike who answered. The short, pale skinned, freckled, black-haired boy smiled widely at Will, then grabbed his arm. A touch that made Will's heart flutter. *But why?*

"Hey, Will, come in!" Mike said, smiling widely, "Hi Ms. Byers, hi Jonathan!"

"Hello, Mike..." Mom said. Soon, Mike's mother was at the door, talking to Jonathan and Mom as Mike pulled Will to the dining room, where the big, rarely used oak table was covered in a white cloth and had been laid out for a nice dinner.

"Mike...what's going on?" Will asked. Mike looked back, then at the table.

"I'm not supposed to tell you yet. It's a surprise. But I overheard my dad talking and..."

"Mike!" Mike's father, Mr. Wheeler, stepped into the room, and put a plate of barbecued ribs onto the table, "This dinner is meant to celebrate you guys graduating middle school...and Nancy and Jonathan becoming seniors..." Mr. Wheeler turned and looked at his wife through his thick glasses, and watched her talking to Mom for almost a minute before clearing his throat.

"Let Joyce in the door before you talk her ear off, Karen..." Mr. Wheeler said, going to his wife. Mike made a sputtering noise with his lips, then lean in to Will's ear.

"We're going on a trip!" Will's eye grew wide, then he looked at Mike.

"Trip? Who?"

"Your family and mine! We're going out to a cabin that my dad's cousin owns..."

"Amazing. The surprise lasted almost ten seconds ..." Mr. Wheeler muttered as he came back to the table, holding a plate of steaming mac and cheese and another of steamed vegetables that made Will's stomach roil, "I suppose we'll start dinner with the announcement then...Nance! Dinner!" Will and Mike took seats next to each other on one side of the table, while Jonathan sat down across from Will on the opposite side. Mr. and Mrs. Wheeler took opposite ends of the table. Mom sat next to Mrs. Wheeler, with Holly in a chair between them, then, finally, Nancy came down the stairs wearing a long, green and white summer dress. She paused mid-stride as she saw that the only chair at the table was next to Jonathan, and sat down gently and cleared her throat.

"Jonathan..."

"Nancy..." the two locked eyes awkwardly for a few moments, then looked away. *Break ups must suck...* Will thought as he watched the two refuse to look at each other again.

"Ahem, Mr. Wheeler," Jonathan started, looked at Mike's father, who opened a beer and took a long drink of it without taking his eyes of Will's brother, "You said something about an announcement..."

"Ahem, yes," the man put down the beer and looked at his wife, in the same indifferent way Will thought a tiger might look at a tiny yapping dog, "As you all know, this first week of summer break is the normal Wheeler getaway trip. Usually, we go with my cousin Thomas..."

"But!" Mike said, leaning forward. Mr. Wheeler looked at him a moment nodded.

"He's got a conference this year, and can't meet us. So, he's letting us use his lake house instead...It sleeps 10 comfortably, and...well, with the leak at the lab and asphyxiation and all, Karen and I thought it might be nice to invite the Byers to the cabin with us..." he cleared his throat and looked at Will, then Jonathan, "It will be a week out in the woods, on Lake Monroe out in the south of the state...and there is boating, fishing, hiking, hunting...along with plenty of woods to explore..." by the time Mr. Wheeler had finished describing the place, Will was smiling as widely as Mike. However, when he looked at

Jonathan, he saw a mix of terror and horror.

"Boys, the Wheelers asked me first, and..." Will's mom frowned in concern, the way she always did, then looked at Jonathan, "I think this will be a good break from Hawkins, and...Will coming to high school is a big moment, I think its worth celebrating with a trip like this..." Mom finished, smiling at her Will, then at Jonathan again. Will's brother's face remained shocked, however, and Will could see Nancy looking almost as frustrated.

"A...a week..." Nancy, who was apparently hearing this for the first time too, muttered softly, looking at Jonathan, then eyed her mother, "Do I have to come? These nerds are just going to be playing Dungeons and Drogans the whole time..."

"It's Dungeons and Dragons..." Mike muttered, "How could you mess that up? What's a Drogan? Nancy you used to play..."

"Nancy...it's a tradition that we go on this trip..." Mr. Wheeler cut in, "You don't get to stay home..."

"I personally think it will be good for us and the Byers to really connect..." Mrs. Wheeler offered.

"Mom..." Nancy said, trying to signal to Jonathan, who was now staring down into his lap. Mike, however, was ready to move on.

"Tell them about the next part too!" Mike said, looking at his father. Mr. Wheeler eyed him coolly.

"The five of us, and the three Byers make 8. It can fit two more, and, to be fair, Mike and Nancy, each of you can invite one more friend..." Mike's face slide into a frown.

"Dad, I thought you said..."

"I talked about this with your mother...One per person! And not Hopper's new girl...El or whatever her name is. Mike, she spends far too much time here at the house...hell, you'd think she lived here..." Mr. Wheeler filled his plate with ribs, "And if I see one more waffle in this house..." Mike looked at Will, who shrugged and smiled.

"We'll still have fun...right?"

"Yeah...you're right," Mike tried to smile, then squinted at his friend, "I have to decide who else to invite..." Will frowned at this too. Part of him really wanted to just hang out with Mike for a week, just to two of them, like they did at school before Lucas transferred to them, or before Dustin showed up in 4th grade. He liked his crew, but sometimes, he just wished he could hang out with Mike.

"Pick one of the boys..." Nancy muttered to her brother, crossing her arms, "I guess I'm supposed to pick a girl to talk to and do my nails with."

"Nancy, you're a teenager..." Mrs. Wheeler said, filling up a plate for Holly, who was slamming her hands on the table, "We trust you to behave, so you can pick whoever you want, boy or girl...but you're coming, and that's that..."

"That's not fair..." Mike muttered, crossing his arms.

"I agree..." Nancy said.

"Well, children, let me tell you something I learned a while ago... about 19 years ago to be exact..." Mr. Wheeler said, looking up at Mrs. Wheeler, "Life...is not fair."

Jonathan picked up another plate and handed it to Nancy, who took it gingerly and scrubbed it over the sink. His mother was with Mrs. Wheeler, talking excitedly about the trip, while Mr. Wheeler's snoring was barely audible through the chatter of the ladies. Mike and Will were downstairs, probably debating how they were going to pick which of their friends would go with them. And Jonathan? Jonathan was helping Nancy clean up from their meal. A month ago, he wouldn't have switched spending a week with Nancy for anything. Now, he wanted to be anywhere else.

"Hand me that spoon. And can you get a bin from that drawer for leftovers..." Nancy asked, wiping her brow with her sleeve. She was acting like nothing was wrong. Like there wasn't going to be a problem with them being together at a lakeside house for a week. If

nothing else, she was doing a lot better job at pretending than Jonathan.

"Wh...wh...which drawer?" Jonathan asked, going the opposite way Nancy was pointing.

"That one! The one to your right, up...up there. And hand me the spoon..." Nancy grumbled. There was a harshness in her tone, and Jonathan felt like he was messing up their relationship all over again. Jonathan hurried to obey, then quietly dried two more plates before Nancy spoke again.

"Since we're going to do this Jonathan..."

"I'll stay out of your way Nance...er...Nancy..." Jonathan jumped in. He hoped that was what she wanted to hear. He wasn't very good at reading most people, but he had Nancy mostly down. *Mostly.*

"No, Jonathan, let's not make this miserable," Nancy said, "We're going to be friends, at least for this week, okay. And I was going to ask you, as a friend, who you think I should invite..." Jonathan looked at her a few moments, and then a name popped out of his mouth before he could even think about it.

"Steve," Jonathan said, then looked down in shock and confusion. *Steve? Why Steve? Real smooth, why not let Nance have 2 ex-boyfriends on the trip instead of one?* Nancy looked confused at first, then her shock turned to amusement.

"Very funny. You know I've been talking to Steve more recently, especially since he's planning on doing a semester at IU..." Nancy sighed, "At least, he going to try one...Bloomington isn't far from Lake Monroe..." Jonathan's eyes grew wide as Nancy started seriously pondering the idea. *Seriously pondering it.*

"Well...maybe it's not such a good idea..." Jonathan jumped in, "He is busy now...getting ready for college, and...his babysitting service..."

"He could take care of Will and Mike too while we're there! My parents would almost pay him to go...That's a good point..." Nancy said. Jonathan just barely stopped himself from facepalming. Was he

trying to torpedo his chances with Nancy?

"Are you sure you don't want to invite one of your friends who's a girl? Like Ally or Stacy? I can spend time with the boys if...if..."

"Jonathan, Ally calls you the ugly duckling of Hawkins. You don't want to know what Stacy calls you. Taking them on the trip with you is not going to be fun. But Steve...you did suggest him..." Nancy said. Jonathan dropped his gaze and sighed. *I know...and I'm already regretting it.* But part of Jonathan wasn't. Part of Jonathan was actually getting excited about the prospect of being with Steve, hanging out with him...seeing him in swim trunks without a shirt...

"I...uh...I suppose...with Will still connected to the Upside Down... Steve's bat might be useful too..." Jonathan murmured, then nearly smacked himself again. He felt like he was fighting a civil war in himself, one side trying to be alone with Nancy, another trying to make sure Steve came.

"Just don't be too rough with him..." Nancy said, handing Jonathan the last plate, "Last time you got in an argument...Steve ended up in pretty bad shape..."

"Yeah...he's really better at fighting otherworldly monsters than other teenagers..." Jonathan said. Nancy laughed at that. A real laugh. Jonathan wanted to grab her and plant a kiss on those sweet smiling lips. But as he moved toward her, ever so slightly, she turned to him and took off her gloves.

"You should probably round up your brother and get home. We're leaving in a few days, and I can't imagine what packing is like with you Byers..." Nancy said, walking past him and brushing her arm into his. Jonathan blushed, but said nothing as she left. *Steve, Nancy, and him. Back together again...in a cabin in the woods.*

"Alright, gentlemen..." Mike said, holding out his hand. There were two straws in it. One, was nothing, worthless, a symbol of abandonment, being left behind. The other...was a golden ticket to a week of partying in a rich house with more Dungeons and Dragons than Lucas could ever want. As he reached his thick brown fingers

out, he felt sweat dripping down his face, and his palm and fingertips were clammy. His other hand was intertwined with Max's, which was just as sweaty and gross. The red headed freckle faced skateboarder was his girl, and they had helped save the world together, as the ultimate adventure party. But, the party was going to have to break up.

"Come on...come on..." Dustin said, touching the left straw gently. Lucas gripped the right between his index finger and thumb, then at the count of three, they drew. Lucas held up the straw, and saw it, full length, beautiful, and with the smell of victory. He looked to Dustin, who seemed frozen in shock.

"I...I lost..."

"Sorry, Dustin, me and Will agreed this was the only fair way..." Mike said, putting a hand on Will. Dustin turned to El, the girl...THE GIRL...who had magic, special powers and now a thick, mangy mess of curly black hair.

"It's...okay..."

"Yeah, it will be..." Max said with a mischievous smile. A mischievous smile Lucas found he really loved, "El, Dustin and I will just hang out...and do all sorts of girl stuff..." Dustin's disappointment became horror, but Lucas, Will and Mike all began to laugh loudly. Max was about as far from girly stuff as a girl could get, and El...well, she didn't know much about the world in general, on account of being locked up at Hawkins lab all those years.

"It's just a week Dustin. And we'll stay in radio contact..." Will offered, trying to comfort their friend. Lucas nudged him in the elbow.

"We'll also let you know about all those trails and hills we explore, along with all those fish and tadpoles we find..."

"Trails...fish..." Dustin muttered, then looked at the two girls, "Any chance I could interest either of you in some leech collection outside of town?" Both drew back from his suggestion, leading to even more laughter from the boys. Lucas then turned to Mike, and pulled him

close.

"Mike...do you think Will's gonna be okay? Without El, or Hopper or..."

"His mom will be there, and so will my sister and Jonathan. And they get to invite a friend too.

"Probably will be some pretty high school girl..." Lucas said, flashing Mike a smile. Lucas got a whack on the back of his head from Max for that comment, but in his mind, he knew it was worth it, "Let's do this, Cabin Adventure 1985!" Lucas did a complicated three way high five with Will and Mike, then smiled widely at the boys. *He was going on adventure. And he'd seen it...Mike had made sure he got the straw.*

"Hey, guys, we're taking bets..." Dustin said, stepping back into the group, "Who do you think Nancy is going to invite?"

"Twenty-One! Twenty-Two!" Steve roared as he pulled up the two heavy dumbbells. He took a deep breath, then thrust the dumbbells forward again, then again, then again.

"Twenty-Five!" Steve dropped the bells and jumped to his feet. It was good, better, much better than he had been. But if he hoped to have a chance of playing intramural basketball, much less in Junior Varsity at IU, he had to get into even better shape. Steve turned to the back of his basement, where his rowing machine sat, sighed and got into position to start pumping. Then, he turned to look at the dresser to his right. A book was sitting on it, a thick bound volume. A gift from Nancy. Something to help sharpen his mind before he left. College was hard, and the *Beginners Guide to College Reading and Writing*, was suppose to help get him ready for his semester at IU. Steve stood slowly from the rowing machine and opened the book and started flipping through it. It was a set of novel chapters and short stories with analysis and tips. And he was tearing through it, faster than he had read any other book in his life. In part because it was interesting, and well written. In part because Nancy had given it to him.

Steve thought back to that moment, when he'd heard Jonathan and Nancy had broken up. When his heart had started pounding and his

mind had raced. He'd heard from the munchkins that Nancy didn't think she could give Jonathan all of herself anymore. That meant she had feelings for someone else...or at least room for them. Steve had thought it was his chance, his opportunity to reclaim Nancy from Byers at least one last time before he went to college. He'd bought flowers, chocolates, even had practiced a number of speeches to tell her that even now, after all those months, he still felt for her. But when he drove up, he'd wrestled and fought with himself to go to the door, and when he finally did, he just rung the doorbell and gave her a copy of Gloria Gaynor's *I Will Survive*. That was how he'd become friends with Nancy again. And Byers...Jonathan had found him at school the day after, went with him to the locker-room, and cried into his shoulder as he explained to Steve in excruciating detail that Nancy had finally figured out he wasn't worth it. Steve had tried to comfort the boy, tell him things were gonna be okay, rubbed his head and wiped away his tears. But, it turned out taking care of middle-schoolers was easier than his peers, and Steve didn't know what to do other than keep patting the Jonathan on the back. While Nancy and he had become close again, Steve hadn't said much other than say "hi" to Jonathan after that. But, every once in a while, his mind would return to that moment, the soft sobs and tight grip Jonathan had on him, the way Steve had stroked him, had ran fingers through his straight black hair. The way Jonathan had pressed into Steve, and how close their...their...

"Steve! Phone!" Steve heard from the stairs. He shook away the thought of Byers away and went to the stairs.

"Who is it? I'm working out Mom!" Steve yelled. There was a pause, then his mother's high, shrill voice returned.

"That girl you were going with. Nana!"

"Nancy, Mom! Her name is Nancy!" Steve groaned. *Speak of the devil...* He went up the steps slowly and found his mother, her curly black and grey hair a mess and her thick glasses weighing down her thin face.

"Here Steve, and don't be too harsh on her..."

"Mom!" Steve grumbled, then grabbed the phone.

"Hello?"

"Steve..." Nancy said. There was a long pause, then Steve laughed breathlessly.

"Good to talk to you too. You know, Nancy, I've been reading that book you gave me..." Steve said, putting a hand on his hip.

"Really? You're reading a book?"

"Yeah I know, shocking...But you have good choice in books..." Steve said, then sighed, "So, what's up?"

"Well, I wanted to talk to you...about a trip I'm taking..."

"Oh, the cabin. I heard from your brother last time I took them to the arcade. Going out to the woods, to a lakeside cabin, just for them. He was hoping to take Lucas, El and Dustin, along with Will. Do you have to go with them too?"

"Well, Steve, the whole Byers family is coming with mine..." Steve stopped his pacing, and looked into the phone, then put it back on his ear.

"Jonathan is gonna come?"

"Yep...And since our parents are making us go, Mike and I get invite one person each..." Well, that would be awkward. Mike and Will would have to pick only one friend. And Nance...she must need advice on how to deal with Jonathan.

"Look, Ally's got to be the choice. She doesn't like Byers, but Stacy really hates that kid and Bethane, or whoever that girl is you hang out with, she's going to bother you as much as Byers is going to bother her...and Byers really likes his brother. Just tell Jonathan to play with them, and you shouldn't have any..."

"Steve..." Nancy interrupted. She sounded stressed, and Steve switched ears with the phone, and frowned.

"Nancy, are you okay? Is something going on with Will or one of the..."

"Steve. Shut up!" Nancy said. Steve waited, then Nancy continued, "I don't want your advice. I want you...er...I mean, I want to invite...you..." Steve froze, then didn't know what to say. The two were silent for a long time before Nancy continued.

"It was Jonathan's idea. He was the one who...who mentioned you. And if there is a problem with Will or something weird..."

"You want my bat?" Steve muttered. Was there about to be something strange, some connection to another world? That was how it was with the Byers, wasn't it? Steven turned to his mother, who was standing too close and hearing too much and shooed her back.

"Has there been a recent...event?"

"No...Steve...it's not about that. I want...I want you to come for me. You don't have to. But I want you to...and Jonathan...he...well he sounded like he did too..."

"Hmph..." Steve smiled, "You know what you're getting into, don't you? Fine..." Steve looked at his mother and smiled, "So, I'm coming with you for a week in the cabin huh? I guess I'll drive my BMW, and take you and whoever else you need. When should I come pick you up?"

"Come on!" Mike muttered, looking through his drawer. Lucas sat on Mike's bed, waiting for other boy to find his last item, the extra batteries for his radio. To call El. Max knew Lucas was leaving, and they'd said bye, and even tried a little kiss. But Mike...Mike couldn't spend more than about 5 seconds from El without having a moment. Lucas groaned and leaned back on Mike's bed.

"Where are they?" Mike asked.

"I have extra batteries, Mike. Will should too..."

"I don't want to use your batteries. You might need them..." Mike said. Lucas rolled his eyes.

"I don't plan on making any long distance—or other dimensional—radio calls ..."

"Mike!" Mr. Wheeler yelled from downstairs, "Let's go! Steve and Nancy are loaded in their car and the Byers are waiting for us..." Lucas sat up, pulled on his backpack and went to the door. Mike kept searching, digging through piles of clothes and old books and toys. Then Lucas saw it. The spare batteries, sitting on one of his dressers.

"Mike..." Lucas snatched them up, "Looking for this?"

"Wha...hey!" Mike raced after Lucas, who rushed down the stairs, slide around an angry looking Mrs. Wheeler and an annoyed looking Mr. Wheeler, and went to the van. Lucas jumped into one side, shut the door and handed Mike's sister Holly the case. And like a normal sister, and unlike his monster of a sibling, she hid it for him.

"Wha...where? My extra batteries! Where are they?" Mike asked, leaning into the car. The door was shut behind him, then Mr. and Mrs. Wheeler got into their seats and started it.

"Thank god. Alright, Wheelers, and Lucas, let's go!" Mr. Wheeler backed up quickly, then slammed the acceleration and hurried away from the home. Lucas turned back to see the Byers Ford Pinto, which Jonathan was driving with Joyce in the front and Will barely visible in the back struggling to keep up, and beyond that, Steve's BMW, which started to make a lot of revving noises as it took the third position. They headed out of town and got on State Road 35, then got on the highway. Mike brooded for about twenty minutes of the drive before Holly finally showed Mike that she had his batteries, then the boys spent most the rest of the ride talking about all the things they'd be doing down at the lake, and all the DnD games they'd have to play.

"Without Dustin though..." Mike murmured, "You guys' party won't be full..."

"It's alright. We can still have fun..." Lucas offered, then looked at Mike, "Can I ask you a question, Mike?"

"Of course..."

"Who do you like more, me or El?" Mike seemed shocked by the question, and drew back.

"What? What kind of question is that? I like you both. Not the same... but I like all my best friends, you, El, Will...Dustin..."

"There was hesitation between Will and Dustin," Lucas said with a wink, which led Mike to roll his eyes, "And I've got the years on Will with you..." Lucas smiled at the thought. Mike was his first friend, and Mike knew it, even if he wouldn't admit it.

"No...I...looked I like you in a different way. Different than El. I like you like a best friend. El and Will I like like..." Lucas did a double take when he heard that.

"Wait, hold on, El and Will you what?"

"I like El and Will and you differently."

"Yeah, but you like, like El. And you said you like, like Will."

"No I didn't! And I don't like either of them more than you!" Mike crossed his arms and turned to the window. Lucas eyed him, then, and looked out his side to the endless cornfields that stretched out around them, and tried to process what Mike just said as they continued south, heading toward Lake Monroe.

"Take...on...me," Jonathan sang. Will backed him up, bouncing against his seatbelt in the back.

"Take on me..."

"Take...me...on!" Jonathan yelled back.

"Take me on!" Will added.

"I'll be gone..." Mom added, joining in. The three took a breath, then finished the song.

"In a day!" They finished with a cheer, then the song changed, and Mom turned back to Will.

"How you doing?"

"I'm great. And so excited..." Will said, touching his bag. It had his DnD characters, drawings and crayons and markers, and two new record tapes Jonathan had made for him.

"I'm glad you're excited buddy. I'm excited too!" Mom said. She looked over at Jonathan, and touched his arm, "And how are you feeling?"

"I'm...okay..." Jonathan said, clearing his throat. He looked uncomfortable in the seat, and Will heard a long sigh from him.

"Jonathan..." Will offered slowly, "You...don't have to hang out with us. If you want to be with Nancy and Steve..."

"No...that's not it. I would never have a problem hanging with you buddy..." Jonathan said, looking up into the mirror. Jonathan still looked bothered, and Will guessed it had something to do with Nancy.

"Sweetie, I'm not going to make you do anything you don't want to do. But getting away from Hawkins and all that mess for a little while..."

"It will be good for all of us. I know..." Jonathan said, looking back at Will, "How did Dustin and El take it? That they were being left behind?"

"Better than Mike did..." Will said with a smile. Then he heard something. Something scratching at the edge of his mind. *Oh no. No, no, no!* Will looked out the window, then closed his eyes. He didn't want to go to the Vale. He didn't want to see that thing. He opened them slowly, and saw he was still in the car, looking out over the cornfields all around them. But something was off. The corn looked different, like Will could almost see the life coming from the plants. He watched for a while, then looked forward to see the outlines of his family. His mother was a shimmering white light, bright, guiding, and loving. Will felt himself draw to it, protected by it. Jonathan, however, was a different shade, darker, brooding, cold, a dim purple but under it was a light, hidden, but still powerful. Jonathan was afraid and embarrassed, Will could sense. He could see Jonathan's feelings for Nancy there. But there was another set of feelings there

too. About Steve. Will watched for a few moments more, trying to understand, when he heard the sound of something coming at him. He turned to the window and saw a creature flying toward him, a human shape. It wasn't human though; it had milky white skin, so thin on the creature that Will could see the outline of its skull. It had torn black and green robes and bright green eyes that seemed to drill under Will's skin.

"You! Will...the Wizard!" The creature uttered in Will's head, "Come...show me...the way, to the dark world!" Just as the creature was about to burst through the car window, Will felt a hand on his arm.

"Will? Can you hear me?" Mom was gripping him tightly, looking terrified. Will shook away the images, and nodded.

"Yeah, sorry, I was just thinking..."

"It wasn't a vision was it?" Jonathan asked. Will looked at him, and swallowed. He wanted to lie about it, say it was nothing. But he also wanted to tell the truth, tell them everything. About this new ability to see people's...aura? Shadows? Whatever they were. He wanted to tell Jonathan he'd seen that he still loved Nancy, and not to feel threatened by Steve. But he couldn't ruin this trip for Mike.

"I just...imagined it again. It was just me imagining though. Not a real vision. I promise..."

"It's okay sweetie, we can turn around and..."

"No, let's go!" Will said, tugging on his seat belt, "Let's have an adventure!" Will said with a smile, then looked back at the window and tried not to think about what he saw. Because it wasn't the Vale of Shadows he just glimpsed. It was another dimension...something else...and it seemed like came with a new monster...

"So, are we not going to talk the whole ride?" Nancy asked, looking at Steve. The boy adjusted his sunglasses slightly, then cleared his throat.

"I don't know what to say..."

"Thanks might be a start. I picked you over all my friends to..."

"And see, that's got me confused..." Steve muttered, "I'd get it, if you and Jonathan weren't broken up, and you wanted me to join you to make it fun. Or if I was invited with a group of our class. But Jonathan, you and I? Your exs? That's our group?" Steve asked, then looked back to the road, "You've got some other motive..."

"Steve. I invited you because you're my friend, and since you're going to college, I want to spend time with you..."

"Sure...keep telling yourself that..." Steve murmured, then turned to merge on 65, "And you are going to enjoy this week with Byers and I. This is going to be a great experience for all of us. Did I mention we're exs? But, its fine, we'll play Candyland and eat nice dinners. Oh, and probably hang out with your little brothers and maybe they'll let us be a part of their dungeons and drogans."

"Dungeons and Dragons, Steve. And no, we'll do teen stuff..."

"Like...?" Steve asked. Nancy hesitated and Steve snorted, "Yep, our teen stuff. Because the three of us, we're the definition of normal teens."

"Steve, I want us all to enjoy this. I don't want the past to...to..."

"Affect our relationship? Or Byers? Good luck with that..."

"If you thought this was such a bad idea, why did you agree to come?" Nancy muttered, crossing her arms. *Because I still love you...* Steve thought, *And I want Jonathan to cry and hold on to me again...*

"Fine..." Steve said, putting his right hand out as he guided the car with his left, "Let's act like adults. Truce between us. Me, you and Byers. Let's start all over once we get there, and have the time of our lives..." Nancy looked at the hand suspiciously, then took it slowly.

"Truce..."

"And I'm not being the babysitter. We're doing that together. If I have

to watch your siblings, you have to come too..." Steve said. Nancy smiled and pushed her hair back.

"I honestly can't remember the last time I 'watched,' Mike." *And I can't remember the last time Nancy and I really hung out* Steve thought,... *much less with Byers...*

2. Chapter 2

Welcome to the next chapter...hope you enjoy!

Chapter 2: The Cabin

"And, here we are..." Mrs. Wheeler said. Lucas looked out the window at the spacious home. It was only one story, but it stretched out wide on lake, and was made of a mix of thick dark wood and grey stone. The home was also surrounded by forest; Lucas could see nothing but tall trees to either side of the house. Lucas recognized from Mr. Clark's classes a few tall ashes, big wide oaks and a few thin springily birch. The trees were thickest to the left of the cabin, while to the right there was a small bit of open field before he saw more woods. The nearest home he could see was across the shimmering blue water.

"This...is gonna be awesome!" Lucas said, jumping out of the car and running out to the edge of the lake. He heard Mike hurrying up behind him, looking out of the slowly moving lake water.

"Look, my cousin has a boat too! And there are trails all along the water. We can go out and explore the whole lake!" Mike said.

"Not alone!" Mrs. Wheeler said as she helped Holly out of her seat, "I want you all to take at least one of the teenagers when you all leave the area around the cabin..."

"And don't go boating without me. Thomas would kill me if I let my kids break something on his precious *Lovely Lady*..." Mr. Wheeler muttered, pulling out the five different suitcases from the car. Lucas knew four of those five were Mrs. Wheeler's, and went to grab his duffle back and slung it over it shoulder. He was about to help grab one of the Wheeler's bags when Will pulled on his arm.

"Look! Lucas!" Will said. Lucas turned back to see the Byers unloading, and Jonathan and Ms. Byers's mouths hanging open.

"This is...beautiful...Karen, I don't know what to say..."

"We can go exploring!" Will said, running to the water's edge, "We can see the whole lake, and everything in it..."

"Not without some supervision..." Ms. Byers said, looking at Jonathan, who pursed his lips, then nodded.

"I'll be sure to take care of them...but first..." Jonathan ruffled through his bag and took out his camera and started taking pictures of the area. Lucas watched him for a moment, listened to the click and wind of his camera, then, he saw Steve come into his peripheral and put a hand on Jonathan's arm.

"Look at this!" Steve said, taking in the scene. He adjusted his sunglasses, and then looked up at the clear, sunny day accompanying their visit, "The house, the forest, the water...I bet you're getting some great pictures Byers..."

"It's smaller than I remember..." Nancy said, getting out of the other side and going to where Jonathan and Steve were.

"We'll still have room in the house though...I think..." Jonathan surmised, taking a few pictures of the house.

"This place is so nice...it's almost...romantic..." Steve said, smiling. Lucas paused, then looked back at the Jonathan and Nancy, who avoiding each other's gazes. Lucas also swore he saw both the older teens start to blush.

"Alright, boys, how about you help an old man out?" Mr. Wheeler groaned, pulling a large suitcase toward the door.

"Yes, Mr. Wheeler..." Steve and Jonathan said at once, then both helped drag the suitcases inside. Lucas followed Mrs. Wheeler in to see a large, sunny, and cozy main room, which ended with a big window looking out at the lake. To his right was a sizable attached kitchen and two hallways that jutted from either side of the back of the main room. Lucas hurried down the hallway to his left and found two bedrooms opposite each other. Both were dainty, with a mix of flower, fish, and aquatic decorations, and each had large queen size bed in its center. Lucas threw his bag in one room, then went back to the main room, where Mr. Wheeler was pointing out how the rooms

would be laid out.

"Alright, so, Joyce, down that hallway to the right there are three rooms. Karen, Holly and I will be in the master, but you take whichever room of the suite you'd like. Nancy, you'll be in the other room..." He turned to Mike and Will, who were murmuring to each other, then pointed to where Lucas was standing in front of his hallway, "That wing is for the boys, Mike, Will, looks like Lucas already claimed you three's room...Steve, Jonathan, you'll take the room opposite them..." Lucas raised an eyebrow, then looked at Jonathan and Steve, who glanced at each other, then back at Mr. Wheeler.

"That room is for all three of us?" Mike asked. His father frowned at him.

"Well," Mrs. Wheeler jumped in, "Mike, you could go stay with Nancy, if you would prefer..."

"No!" Nancy, Mike, and Will all yelled at once. Lucas smiled, then Mike went into a closet and pulled out a sleeping bag.

"We'll make it work..." Mike said, going back toward the room. Mr. Wheeler looked at Steve and Jonathan, who seemed awfully uncomfortable to Lucas.

"And you boys ok with your arrangements? I know you're both here as Nancy's friends and that you're teenagers, but I don't want any fornicating in this house..."

"Ted, for the love of God..." Mrs. Wheeler started.

"We, ahem, understand, Mr. Wheeler..." Steve said.

"Yes, we do..." Jonathan confirmed. Mr. Wheeler nodded at them, then looked at Mrs. Wheeler.

"You see, they respond better than our own children. I hope Mike grows up to be have a genial and respectful as you two..."

"Thank you, Mr. Wheeler," Steve said, then started toward his room. Jonathan nodded slightly, then kept his head down as he followed

Steve. Lucas saw Nancy was watching then, biting her lip as they left.

"Nance..." Mrs. Wheeler said, "Why don't you go get unpacked? Joyce and I will start on dinner..." Nancy turned and wordlessly went to her room, while Mr. Wheeler sat down on the couch of the main room and turned on a baseball game.

"2 minutes in the house and there is already drama..." Lucas muttered, "This trip is going to be crazy..."

Jonathan put his bag very gently to one side of the bed, then picked it up again as Steve looked at him.

"It's...it's only..."

"I see that there's only one bed. Pick a side..." Steve muttered. Jonathan set his bag back down to the right side, and then looked at Steve, who sighed and took the left. Jonathan paused suddenly, was about to open his mouth and apologize, then shut it again. Nancy had always preferred the right side, he should have taken the left. When they spooned, it was usually left to right, and now, he'd be on the receiving of Steve's...*No! I'm not thinking about that!* Jonathan forced his eyes closed, then opened them again and looked at Steve. King Steve, who just a year and half ago Jonathan had knocked senseless. It seemed like a lifetime ago, before Demogorgons, and mind flayer invasions...and breakups.

"Well, do you like the room?" Jonathan asked, trying to make conversation. *So stupid...what a stupid question...what am I trying to do?*

"It's alright...a bit small, especially for two guys our age...but we'll make it work..." Steve murmured, then looked at a framed hand-drawn map of the lake, "This is a real pretty place. I think we can enjoy it...if..."

"If we can get over our past..." Jonathan muttered, putting his camera down by his beside gently. Better not to remind Steve of their first interactions with a camera. Steve turned to him, then nodded.

"If we can get over our past...our breakups and the evil shadow monsters...." Steve looked back to the window and at the lake stretching out beyond the home and sighed, "How's your brother?"

"He's mostly recovered. Sometimes he still has moments, looking into the Vale. I think he may have had one on the ride over..."

"You think there will be trouble?" Steve turned back to him and put his hands in his pockets.

"Well, according to the scientists and Hopper, as long as the gate's closed...nothing more can break into our world from the Vale. Not without some outside help..."

"Excuse me if I don't trust those government hacks..." Steve muttered, then looked Jonathan over, "Byers...you been working out?" Jonathan hesitated for a few moments, then Steve moved to him and gripped his arm.

"Look at this muscle...damn...I need some tips for arms like that..." *Carrying a heavy video camera...along with a lot of masturbation.* Jonathan thought, then cleared his throat.

"I'm trying to get stronger, to help protect my brother and my mom..."

"Well it's working. You look stronger. And more protective..." Steve went over to his bag and pulled out his messily folded clothes, "Between the two of us...maybe this trip won't turn into another horrible nightmare..."

"Maybe it will just be a total mess..." Jonathan murmured as he started unpacking much more organized things.

"So, what do you guys want to start with? Where should we go exploring tomorrow?" Mike asked Will and Lucas at the dinner table. Mrs. Wheeler and Mom had been talking nonstop and Will hadn't heard Jonathan, Nancy or Steve say more than two words to each other at all so far on the trip. Mr. Wheeler was eating his spaghetti and meatballs and pretending Mrs. Wheeler wasn't saying anything

important, which Will knew was normal for him. Mike picked up a meatball with his fork, then looked at Will specifically.

"Hey, are you okay?"

"Huh? Yeah. I'm fine..." Will said quickly. He was still thinking about it, the milk-skinned creature. And that other dimension. The one where he could see life forces.

"What is there to explore? Anything crazy? A quarry? A cliff?" Lucas asked. Mike smiled.

"Somewhere back in the woods is a small pond off the lake with a little waterfall and small cave. I think it's a gorge ..." Mike said. Nancy blew out her breath and shook her head.

"It's a grotto, Mike. A gorge is an opening between cliffs..." Nancy said, "I thought you were a science nerd?"

"Oh, so now you can speak, just to insult me! I thought you could care less about me!" Mike shot back, escalating the situation. Nancy eyed him darkly.

"Do you know how to talk to me without being a jerk?"

"Do you know how to not be a douchbag?"

"Enough!" Mr. Wheeler said in a commanding tone, "We've been here less than a day, and you two are already squabbling. Can't you be more like Jonathan and his brother?" Will looked at Jonathan, then back at Mr. Wheeler.

"Th...thank you for hosting us..." Jonathan said, clearly trying to fit the mold. Will nodded in agreement.

"It's our pleasure..." Mrs. Wheeler said, "Now, remember..."

"We can't go explore alone. We have to take a teenager..." Mike muttered. Jonathan looked at Nancy and Steve and was about to say something, but Nancy interrupted again.

"We'll go with them tomorrow. All of us. We'll go as a group..."

Nancy said, smiling at Mike. It was so forced, Will thought Nancy might hurt a muscle on her face, but her parents nodded in approval.

"Good, very good..." Mr. Wheeler said, scooping up another fork full of spaghetti, "That's more like it..." Will looked at Mike, who seemed horrified, then at Lucas, who actually looked amused with this.

"I guess this is going to be our party now..." Mike murmured.

"You've got to stop saying that..." Nancy muttered under her breath.

"Not the party I would have chosen...especially not one with a fairy princess," Mike said.

"Kid, from what little I understand about your games..." Steve jumped in, leaning toward Mike, "Sometimes, you don't get to pick your party. Sometimes, you go with what you got..." Will smiled at this, started to laugh, then saw that the people at the table...weren't people anymore. They were figures, vague outlines. Steve a dim blue, like the late afternoon on a cloudy day. Nancy a shining yellow, bright as a daisy. And Jonathan was a violet color, brighter now, but still with doubts. In fact, all three had doubts hidden in them, about themselves and about each other. Will turned to Mike, and saw red, flashing anger, frustration, and Lucas, green, silly, excited. Then, Will saw it. Between Jonathan and Steve, across the table from him. The milky-white creature, in its green and black robe with its shining green eyes. Will stared at it, frozen. He could see it better now, how tight the skin was against its bones, how tattered the robes on its form were. And the small, tight crown of silver and emeralds that sat on its head. It leaned between Steve and Jonathan's outline, and opened its mouth to reveal a set of sharp, misshapen and decayed teeth.

"Take me there..." It whispered. Will could see that the dark hole that defined the inside of his mouth was pitch black and the wisps of green smoke that were rising from the creature's exposed flesh.

"Wh...where?" Will asked, drawing back in fear.

"There..." the creature started, "To the dark lands..." Will saw the Vale of Shadow in his mind, the dark of the land, the spores that

filled it, and the Mind Flayer, towering over everything, with the horrible red and black storm flashing around it. The milk-skin creature twisted its face into a smile, its skin seeming to almost tear as it shifted its jaw. Then, it reached out a long, bony hand defined by pointed nails toward the boy. Will tried to move back, then fell out of his chair and crashed to the floor. When he opened his eyes, Mike, Jonathan and Mom were on top of him, holding him.

"Will? Will! Are you okay?"

"I...I..." Will hesitated, then looked at Mike "...fell asleep...You and Nancy's arguing was so boring..." This comment came out of nowhere, and at first, Mike, Jonathan, and his mom just stared at him. Then, Steve burst out laughing from the table. Lucas started laughing too, loudly, louder than either of them should have. Mr. Wheeler started to chuckle too, and Jonathan smiled and dropped his head. Soon, everyone was laughing except Mike and Nancy, who seemed more annoyed than anything, and his mom who was still hanging over him.

"Will, you have to talk to me. Did you have a vision? Do we need to call Hopper or El or...or..."

"Mom...it's fine. It can't hurt me..." Will lied. Well, partially lied. The Mind Flayer, or the thing in the Vale, it could vaguely sense where Will was, and occasionally it tried to reach out to him. But it didn't touch him or attack him anymore. Not like this new thing. But his mom had been through enough. They all had.

"You sure sweetie? Because we...we..."

"We're going on an adventure tomorrow..." Will said, slipping out from his mom's grasp and looking at Mike, then, Lucas, then Nancy, Jonathan and Steve, "And that's final!"

Lucas took out his radio, twisted the knob, and tried to call Max again as he walked. The signal wasn't coming through very well, and it was mostly making static. He sighed and closed the radio, then looked at Will, who shrugged.

"It's not working?"

"No...I thought Mike had hitched up the radios so that they would send out slow AM waves and let us call the others...but, I guess we'll just have to use the telephone when we get back..."

"Yeah...I bet you miss Max..."

"I mean, kind've, but..." Lucas was interrupted by Will putting a hand on his chest.

"Did you see that?"

"See what?"

"That...that...never mind..." Will said, dropping his head. Lucas looked at him, turned to where Will had been staring, then shrugged and kept going. Steve was just in front of him, carrying two towels, some snacks and some other things. Nancy and Mike were in front of them, both holding up a big map of the trails and arguing about which way to go loud enough to hear back in Hawkins. And behind them, bringing up the rear was Jonathan, gripping his camera and a small satchel, which had Will's radio in it. Just in case the high schoolers got separated from the middle-schoolers. Though...They weren't really "middle-schoolers" anymore, and Nancy, Jonathan and Steve weren't just the "high-schoolers" anymore either. Steve was going to college, and Lucas, Mike and Will were going to be 9th graders next fall. That was a change Lucas didn't really know if he was ready for.

"Oh my god!" Steve groaned, pulling his backpack tighter on his back, "Be careful you don't fall asleep again, Will...because they just won't stop up there..." Mike and Nancy were getting particularly animated now that they had reached a fork in the trail, and Steve looked fed up with it, "Hey, Wheeler! Knock it off!" Steve got between the two, snatched the map, and put it in Nancy's hand.

"Hey!" Mike complained. Steve turned and grabbed the boy by the collar.

"Listen up, Wheeler. You're gonna shut up and follow the directions

Nancy gives you, or so help me..."

"That's not fair!"

"I don't give two sh*ts about how fair it is. Get your *ss in line and stop giving Nancy so much trouble!" Steve roared, then turned and walked with Nancy, who was smiling at her brother. Lucas didn't know why, but he had really enjoyed watching Mike put in his place, and let out a loud laugh when Mike came over to him.

"What's so funny?"

"You..." Lucas said, "Steve told you..."

"That wasn't funny! It was..."

"Did you guys hear that?" Will asked, looking around him. Mike and Lucas looked at him, but before they could respond, there was the sound of a shutter and click, then both Steve and Nancy were yelling.

"Byers! Quit with the pictures, there isn't even anything to see yet!" Steve called back. Jonathan lowered the camera, and Nancy started waving at him.

"Jonathan!" Nancy yelled, "Just...come here! Up with us! And don't you three fall behind! Especially you, douchbag!" Nancy yelled. Mike gave her a hard frown, as a reprimanded Jonathan walked past Mike and waved a finger at him.

"Listen to your sister, bud..."

"What do you know about it?" Mike grunted back. Steve turned around and raised his fist, which sent Mike cowering, then the three older kids kept walking, taking long, quick strides and starting to leave the three younger ones behind. Lucas strained to hear their conversation, which mostly involved how Jonathan could keep Will tame and why those strategies weren't working very well on Mike.

"Lucas..." Will said, grabbing his friend's hand, "Listen. Someone...or something, is following us..."

"What do you mean? Like...like a monster?"

"A Demogorgon?" Mike said, genuinely concerned.

"No...I don't think so...it's not like that. It's..." Will sighed, looked at his friends, then dropped his head, "I've started having visions again. But they're not the same..." the three boys stopped walking, and Mike put his hand on Will's shoulder.

"What? Why didn't you say anything? Will, you remember what happened the last time you tried to face a nightmare alone?" Mike demanded. Lucas put a hand on his friend to calm him down, then turned to Will.

"You said they're different..."

"It's a different monster. And it's not the Vale of Shadows. It's another type of vision, or world. One where I can see...I don't know, auras? Or life forces? Lights from people. And there is a creature, with milky white and rotting skin that talked to me..."

"Was it tall? And undead? And wearing a crown?" Mike asked. Will looked at him, confused.

"Uh...yeah...sorta..."

"A Lich!" Mike said, opening his bag to take out a Monster's Guide to Dungeons and Dragons. He flipped through it quickly to a page with a picture of a Lich with a mix between a zombie king and a skeleton.

"This?"

"That is...like it..."

"A new monster...oh boy..." Lucas groaned and pulled out his radio, "We're going to have to call El about this...the Lich in Dungeon and Dragons is undead, and can cast magic. Plus, it's a boss none of us have been brave enough to face...Steve, we need..." Lucas turned and saw the older kids had not waited. They were long gone, and Lucas could see no sign of them. He looked back to Mike and Will, and raised his eyebrows.

"Uh...where did they go?"

"Probably took a wrong turn..." Mike said. Lucas sighed, then tuned his radio to call Jonathan on Will's.

"Wait, we don't need them!" Mike said, pushing down the antennae, "I'll get us to the grotto...we'll come up with a plan for the Lich along the way..." Mike said. Will stopped suddenly again, and pointed, then leaned in to Mike and Lucas.

"It's a person! I see their lifeform...its black and dark...that's what following us..." he whispered, "Who would be following us? And why?"

"Well...there's one sure way to find out...snare them..." Lucas said with a smile, pulling the rope from his back.

"I can't believe that little sh*t's attitude..." Nancy groaned, stomping forward. At this point, Jonathan was starting to fall behind, and even Steve was having trouble keeping up with the girl's quick, frustrated strides.

"Nancy...wait...try not to get so mad..." Steve said.

"Yeah...he is your brother..." Jonathan called from further back.

"I don't know how we could be related by blood. Actually, my mom is a chattering wimp, my dad is a tired, boring old man and my brother is a hot mess of early teen angst. I don't know how any of us are related..." Nancy turned a sharp right, then started through a small cove of thicket.

"Wha...where are you going?" Steve asked. He got no reply as Nancy continued through the brush. Jonathan caught up with Steve, looked at him briefly, then called into the thicket.

"Nance...hold on!" Jonathan yelled, then started through it. Steve sighed deeply, then tried to follow him.

"It's like I'm adopted! Because I'm the only person in the family who seems to know how to do anything!" Nancy roared, pushing through the last of the cove and then turning and crossing her arms. Steve and Jonathan got through the thicket, looked at her, then saw it. The

grotto.

Steve thought it could have been a painting it was so beautiful. The first thing to catch his eye was the waterfall, a long line of white water splashing into a small pool. Foam was gathered around where the waterfall met the pond, enough so that Steve could tell that the pool was actually rather deep; deep enough that they could get in. The pond was surrounded by smooth pieces of limestone, and a thin stream led away from the waterfall, back toward the lake. The waterfall flowed from a small cliff, a thick mix of limestone and dirt both carved out by the water and covered in lush, green vegetation. Steve was so awestruck that he felt frozen for a long time, trying to process the beautiful place, and he could see from the corner of his eye that Jonathan was struck in the same way.

"It's...it's...so pretty..." Steve stammered out. Jonathan raised his camera, and took a few pictures, but Nancy let out a sigh.

"Well? I was right, wasn't I? I told you. And that little sh*tty horror of a brother..."

"I never doubted you..." Steve said, finally turning his gaze back to Nancy. Jonathan lowered the lens and turned back to look around behind them.

"Wait, where are the others?"

"They were behind us..." Steve turned and went back to the thicket, but he couldn't see anything other than the rustling of leaves in the wind.

"Hey, Munchkins!" Steve called.

"Will!" Jonathan added, "Will, where are you?" There was the sound of movement in the woods, but nothing reacted.

"Damn...alright Jonathan, you want to go to the right, I'll head left and Nancy, you go straight through the thicket and wait there for them. We'll meet back here in 10..." Steve turned back to see Nancy, undoing her shoes next to the water.

"Nance, what are you..." Jonathan started.

"I'm not going searching for Mike. He told me he could find his own way here. I'll wait and see if it's true..."

"But..." Steve started.

"Will..."

"We have that if there's a problem, don't we..." Nancy said, nodding toward Jonathan's bag. The morose boy grimaced, then took out Will's radio.

"I suppose..."

"They'll call us if there is an issue ..." Nancy said, then opened her bag, which had two towels in it, "I'm going to enjoy the grotto..." Steve frowned at Jonathan, who looked horrified with the concept of leaving Will unguarded, then at Nancy. He went to the pool slowly, and put a hand in the water. It was cool, but comfortable, and Steve was really thinking about putting his feet in. Steve looked back to Jonathan, who seemed to be trying to mouth words but wasn't making any sound.

"Well...they can call us..." Steve murmured, then started undoing his shoes. Nancy smiled at him, then put her feet in the water and let out a moan.

"Oh...this is perfect...I want to just get in all the way..."

"We don't have bathing suits..." Jonathan said. Steve looked back at him. *That was the one phrase you could manage?*

"We can make due..." Nancy said, undoing her blouse and flinging it onto her bag. Steve's eyes grew wide and he felt frozen again as Nancy undid her jeans and threw them back too. She was in her underwear, in front of her exs, and slide into the water with a gasp and small line of ripples.

"I...I...ah, hell!" Steve eyed Jonathan, then took off his shirt, dropped his pants and jumped into the water in his boxers. Steve felt there was something—rebellious—about what they were doing. He ducked his hair in the water, ran his fingers through the Farah Fawcett spray dripping out of his hair, then turned to Jonathan, who was at that

point shirtless, but seemed to still be deciding about his pants. Steve decided to make the decision for him.

"Come on Byers!" Steve said, splashing water toward him, "Live a little!" Nancy giggled at this, and that made Steve's heart flutter. Jonathan looked down, remaining silent, then started pulling at his belt.

"Yeah! Jonathan!" Nancy yelled, splashing back in the water. Steve turned to her with a smile, then looked back and felt his eyes widen. He now understood Jonathan's hesitation. Jonathan was wearing the tightest pair of briefs Steve had ever seen. They outlined Jonathan's business clearly, and Steve had a really hard time pulling his eyes away as Jonathan dropped his head and started to turn red.

"Sorry, sorry, I...I..." Jonathan started to reach for his pants when Nancy slid from the water, grabbed Jonathan's hand and pulled him in.

"No turning back now...and nothing I haven't already seen..." Nancy said. Jonathan nodded to her, then turned slowly to look at Steve, who shrugged. Part of felt embarrassed for Byers, but part of him was relishing the idea of having him wet in those tight briefs. *What if they fall off?*

"Ain't nothing that new to me either. Besides, as much as you got down there, I'm surprised you're not showing that off every chance you get..." Steve said, smiling. Jonathan smiled back at him, genuinely, then Nancy splashed his wild mop of hair. Steve rushed forward and grabbed Nancy by the waist, then held her as Jonathan splashed her back. And soon the three of them were having fun and laughing, really laughing. For that moment, they were truly forgetting about the past...as well as the younger group they were supposed to be watching.

"Alright..." Lucas said, sprinkling leaves over the second snare he set. He turned back to Will, who was trying to look through the woods.

"Do you see them? Are they close?"

"No...they're hiding...or they left..."

"Well, we'll start walking away from this area for a little bit, and see if we can catch anything..." Lucas said.

"You know..." Will said, frowning, "I wonder how often I can see into the other dimension..."

"Why?"

"Because, I saw you in that form once at dinner, and I haven't see you like that since then..."

"What are you trying to say?"

"Maybe...it's not like the Vale of Shadows. Maybe I can't see as well into that dimension..."

"So...are you saying that those people might be out there and you can't detect them? So I set up this snare in daylight and they might have been watching it?" Lucas started to yell at Will, who drew back from his friend.

"Hey guys..." Will and Lucas turned to see Mike approaching them. He stopped a few steps from a snare and Lucas guided him around it by pointing.

"Did you find the grotto?"

"No...this trail map doesn't make sense. I just kept ending up back at the lake. Did you set up the traps?"

"Yeah, but it turns out Will may not be as good of a spy..." Lucas muttered. Will dropped his head and sighed.

"I'm sorry..."

"Don't apologize. And don't be so hard on him...I mean, what do you know about his powers? Or whatever's stalking us..." Mike said. Will looked up and was about to say something when a force came from behind and knocked him to the ground. Will was face down in grass and mud before he recognized that a boot had kicked him, the same

boot that was now pressing down on his back.

"Wha..." Mike started, when Lucas was grabbed by the neck by another figure in black. Mike turned to get him, but was grasped and thrown to the ground himself. Will tried to move and help his friends, but the boot was crushing his back. Then he felt breath come down next to his ear.

"Hey, zombie boy..." Will turned and saw Troy Thompson, and sighed in a combination of annoyance and relief.

"It's just the bullies..." Will murmured as he was pulled to his feet. Troy was a big, dark-haired mouth-breather from school who had it out for the boys. Especially after El made him pee his pants in front of most their class. *But what was he doing out here?*

"We got a full freak show here...and you don't have the evil, magic girl to protect you..." this came from Troy's backup, James Crump, who was standing next to Mike, an arm around his neck. The last figure though, the one who had Lucas in a headlock was bigger. And wearing a floor length cloak of black.

"Who..."

"We found a new friend, who hates you as much as we do..." James said. The figure pulled back his cloak, and revealed...Billy Hargrove...

"Hey little freaks...especially you, Lucas..." Billy muttered, tightening his grasp on Lucas.

"We are screwed..." Mike muttered in James' grasp. But Will knew what to do.

"Jonathan! Steve! Nancy!" Will yelled, kicking out of Troy's arms and rushing to Lucas's bag. Before Troy could catch him, he'd grabbed his radio, and yelled into it.

"Jonathan! Jonathan!" Will roared as Troy grabbed the radio and smashed it.

"Jonathan!" called out from the radio, and Jonathan burst from the water as he heard his name and rushed to the radio sitting on the side of the pool.

"Will? Will?" Jonathan called back, holding the radio up. He turned back to Nancy and Steve, who stopped their game of Marco Polo and jumped from the water as well.

"Will, are you there? Will!"

"Try Mike's!" Nancy called, grabbing her jeans. Jonathan couldn't be bothered with clothes now though. Something was happening to Will.

"Mike! Will! Anyone!"

"Jon...St...Nancy!" Mike called, then there was the sound of an oof, then the radio went dead.

"The boys!" Jonathan grabbed his shoes, pulled them on, then started running into the woods.

"Wait! Byers! Your pants! Dammit!" Steve called. Jonathan glanced back to see Steve pulling on shoes and running too. Nancy was getting her pants on though, and getting further and further behind. Jonathan jumped through the thicket, then got back onto the trail. From there, he heard yelling, and started racing toward it.

"Will! Will!" Jonathan called. He turned down on path, then another, then came to a clearing and saw them. A group of people, and Will was on the ground, with a foot on his chest.

"Will!" Jonathan roared, jumping into the thicket and raising his fist, "Let go of my brother!" Jonathan looked at the three figures in black and saw two were Will's age, boys he'd seen at the middle school. And the third with Billy Hargrove.

"Billy? What..." Jonathan challenged, "Why..." Jonathan turned to Will, took a step, then his whole world seemed to fall out from under him. Something tightened around his leg and next he knew, he was upside down, hanging by his leg from a tree. In his wet briefs.

"Byers...oh...this could not be more perfect..." Billy called, smiling

darkly, "Rushes naked through the forest to rescue his brother...and is caught in his own brother's trap...You Byers are a strange *ss bunch..." Jonathan started feel the blood going to his head, and tried to reach his foot and undo himself, but it was too hard, too far away. And he was still soaked and mostly naked.

"What do you guys want, Hargrove..." Lucas asked, still struggling in Billy's grip.

"Those ugly, fat lips of yours touched my sister's..." Billy grunted, "I'm thinking about cutting them off..." Billy drew a knife, which made Lucas start to whimper, "But, first, Troy there wants something specific..." Jonathan turned his head to see Troy pull Will's arms together and point at Mike.

"You're gonna pee yourself, in front of all your friends here..."

"What?" Mike asked. He got a punch in the back from James.

"You heard him. Pee yourself..."

"I...but..."

"Wheeler, last time I told you to jump off a cliff and my arm was broken. I don't want anything special. Just...pee in your pants..."

"I...I don't have to go..." Mike muttered. Jonathan was having a hard time following the conversation from upside down, but he did see Steve coming into the clearing.

"Maybe if I take off Lucas' lips you'll give him what he wants..." Billy offered, then turned in shock.

"Billy?" Jonathan saw Steve step into the clearing. He was also in his wet boxers, and looked very confused.

"Harrington..." Billy eyed him, then looked up at Jonathan, "You're half-naked too! Don't tell me you're a fag now..."

"I...why are you here Hargrove? And why are you with...these...punks?" Steve asked. Billy raised an eyebrow and smiled.

"They're here to help me protect my sister...and make your little freaks pay..." Billy started, "I asked nicely, and Max told me Lucas here would be on a trip out in the woods. It turns out James' family also has a summer home here at Lake Monroe...and we had a shared interest. All we had to do was listen for your friends here screaming on this trail and..." Billy trailed off. Jonathan saw Nancy come out of the woods. She had her pants on, but only her bra as a top.

"Wheeler...this just gets better and better. So, Byers and Harrington skewer you? Or you just suck them off one at a time?" Nancy frowned at Billy for a moment, then drew a pistol from behind her and pointed it at him.

"Let go of Lucas, Will and my brother..." James and Troy jumped back from the boys upon seeing the gun, but Billy didn't budge.

"Wheeler...come on...we both know that you're not going to shoot me..."

"Yeah...but they don't..." Nancy said. Jonathan only then noticed that Will was running over to where he was hanging.

"Here! Jonathan! A knife!" Will threw it up in the air, and Jonathan just barely caught it. He summoned all his energy, and swung himself up to grab the rope. It was thick and took a lot of work, but finally, the rope started to fray, then snapped and dropped Jonathan roughly to the ground. He pulled himself up, and took in the scene. Steve had jumped at Billy, freeing Lucas to run and attack James with Mike. Troy was still hesitating, as Nancy was holding up her gun and yelling at Steve to "Kick Billy's *ss." Jonathan rushed past Will, grabbed Troy and flung him hard into the other bully James. He turned to see Billy had got the upper hand and was starting to punch Steve senseless.

"Steve!" Jonathan called, more afraid and concerned than he'd planned, then tried to rush to him. The boys, Troy and James, regained their footing and started running, not at Jonathan but at Will. Jonathan stopped and tried to pick which way to go, feeling confused in his heart and mind, when the two boys going to Will seemed to both trip over themselves. One, Troy, rolled up to Will and hit his head on a rock, while the other James, seemed to fall into

another snare, and was pulled up into the air by his foot. Jonathan then turned back to Billy, raced over and pulled him off Steve. Billy punched Jonathan hard in the chest, but Jonathan gave him a counterpunch to face. Billy started to fall back, then, Jonathan heard a crack, and Billy collapsed lifelessly to the ground. Nancy was standing over him, holding the pistol by its barrel. Steve, now with a busted lip and a gash on his face, stood up and slowly and spat on Billy.

"Take that you son of b*tch..." he turned and flashed a bloody smile at Jonathan, "Heh, we make a pretty good team..."

"Yeah...but you've got to stop picking fights you can't win..." Nancy said, touching his face gently. Jonathan found it endearing, then heard a sound. He turned around to see Troy trying to sneak away. Mike tackled him to the ground before he could leave, and Lucas and him dragged the boy back to where his friend was hanging from a tree. Jonathan joined Steve, Nancy, Mike, Lucas and Will in facing down these two boys.

"Listen up...you little punks. These three...they're little sh*ts..." Steve yelled, spitting blood and pointing angrily at Will, Mike and Lucas, "But they're our little sh*ts, and you won't ever bother than again!" Steve said, grabbing Troy by the collar. He gave him a scowl, then dropped him to the ground and crossed his arms, "Let me explain how this is going to go. First, you two, and Hargrove, you're going to go back to your pretty summer house and tell your parents you had a run in with some animals, wolves, bears, whatever makes you feel tough. You guys got hurt...but you definitely didn't see any of us. And you won't end up seeing any of us the whole time you're here, right?" Troy nodded quickly, then Steve continued.

"And of course, none of us..." Steve signaled to the group, "Did anything to you...unless you want Sheriff Hopper to known Hawkins has a few more stalkers..." Steve said. Troy shook his head in response, then Steve smiled and patted his head, "Now, cut down your friend, pick up Hargrove and all of you get out of here!" Troy nodded quickly, then Steve made a disgusted face and frowned, "And kid, get a new change of pants...pissing yourself is just gross..." Troy looked down to see his pants wet and all the group laughed as he struggled to get his friend down. As Steve, Nancy, Mike and Lucas

watched him struggle, Jonathan turned to his brother.

"Will. Are you okay? Are you..."

"I'm good. You guys really put it to these bullies..."

"Well, you know you can always count on me..." Jonathan said.

"I know..." Will said, putting his hand around Jonathan. Or, more specifically, Jonathan's tight wet briefs.

"Uh...Jonathan, why are you guys in your underwear?" Mike asked, looking at Steve in his boxers. Jonathan turned to Nancy and Steve.

"We were swimming..." Steve muttered, "Down at the grotto..."

"Come on Mike...let me show you..." Nancy held out a hand. Mike took it, and Jonathan saw, just for a moment, their relationship thaw.

"Will..." Jonathan said, "You'll love this place..."

"Yahoo!" Lucas said, jumping into the pond. The resulting splash caused Steve to flinch, and as soon Lucas surfaced, he grabbed hold of the boy.

"Watch it!" Steve tossed him into Mike, causing the two of them to splash together and the others to laugh in response. Will was standing under the waterfall with Jonathan, smiling as he watched his friends play.

"So..." Will started, looking at his brother, "How long do you think we'll have to stay under here to have hair like Steve?" Jonathan smiled at him then glanced up at their friend.

"It might be a while..." Jonathan said, "Steve's...a really great guy..."

"I know you like him a lot..." Will said, then looked at Nancy, who was lounging on a towel on a nearby rock with sunglasses and a magazine, "And her too...even though...you..."

"Nancy..." Mike said, coming toward the edge of the pool, "Come on,

come play..."

"I already swam a lot today Mike..." Nancy said. Mike made a sputtering noise, then turned back toward Lucas. As soon as he did, Nancy rose from her place and kicked up a wave of water over Mike. The boy turned around as Nancy laughed at him and splashed his sister back.

"Hey! Be nice Mike!" Jonathan said, moving toward Mike. Will watched them, his friends and family, the people he loved in the world. It was beautiful, amazing, like a dream...until the icy cold, bone thin hand reached out and touched his shoulder. Will started to breath heavily as the Lich's face approached his.

"You're...welcome..." the creature said. Will blinked, and saw it again, the Lich, tripping Troy, knocking him into a rock, then pushing James into the trap.

"I help...you...help me...to reach...the shadows!" the Lich roared this last part, and Will saw the Vale again, the spores, the darkness, the storm, and the Mind Flayer, tentacled monster towering over everything. Will started to heave then turned back to the Lich and saw that it was gone. He was back under the waterfall, and Jonathan was gripping his shoulders.

"Will..." Will looked up at Jonathan standing over him, then back to Steve, Mike, Lucas and Nancy behind him.

"Jonathan..." Will started, "It's not over..."

"It's...just...beginning..." the Lich's voice echoed in Will's ear.

3. Chapter 3

Strange Things in the Cabin

Chapter 3: You May Not Have to Choose

This chapter is definitely M, ladies and gentlemen. Stoncy all the way. Brace yourselves.

"Alright! Have a good time!" Jonathan said, "And you call me if there is trouble!" He held up a radio as the boat glided away from the pier.

"We will!" Mike offered. It was a beautiful summer day, and the boat was gliding away slowly, with Will standing on the edge watching him. He couldn't deny that he wasn't a little worried. He was going to be left alone today with Nancy, and Steve. And Will had started having visions again. Steve and Nancy were behind Jonathan, waving too. Jonathan could see Lucas and Mike behind his brother, all in swim trunks, and waving back at the three, while Mr. Wheeler was directing the boat away with gentle turns of the wheel. Mrs. Wheeler and Jonathan's mother were visiting one of their mutual friends in Bloomington for the day with Holly, and the house was left to the older teenagers. Jonathan held up his camera, took a picture of the fading boat, then looked back to Steve and Nancy, and tried to swallow his anxiety. Nancy was so pretty in her summer dress that stretched down to her ankles, and twirled gently in the wind. Jonathan also noted that Steve looked pretty good himself that day, the wind blowing his perfect hair gently, and his sunglasses and tight tee-shirt made him look like the hero who had once fought monsters from another dimension alongside Jonathan and Nancy. Jonathan felt himself bite his lip as he looked over Nancy, but he also felt his eyes drawn to Steve. A true man. Nancy was so gorgeous, and Steve was so handsome...

"And, the munchkins are gone..." Steve muttered, crossing his arms, "So, what should we do now?" *Kiss...* was the first thought that popped into Jonathan's head, though he nearly freaked out over the idea. *Kissing? Kissing who? Steve? Steve was a boy! Jonathan wasn't...he*

wasn't, he couldn't be. His father had beat it out of him.

"Let's not go exploring..." Nancy muttered, "Our siblings make us do too much of that, and I'm not keen to run into Billy Hargrove again. How about some games and a movie..."

"Sounds good to me..." Steve said, smiling, then started back from the dock. Nancy followed him, then turned back to Jonathan, who was watching Will fade on the boat in the distance.

"Are you coming?"

"Yeah...yeah..." Jonathan said, coming up behind Nancy and going into the home. Nancy touched him on the shoulder.

"They have the radios...they'll call us if something happens...try to relax..." Jonathan smiled at her, then raised his camera and took a picture.

"What was that for?"

"I like to capture true beauty..." Jonathan said. It sounded so smooth in his head. But as he said it to his ex-girlfriend, it didn't sound anything but awkward.

"I...uh..."

"I'm sorry..." Jonathan said quickly, then hurried to the main room, where Steve was holding up a set of VCRs.

"It's pretty slim pickings. They got a couple horror movies, several bad comedies, a few dramas, and a sci-fi movie. So...which will it be? *Trading Places* or *The Thing*..." Steve muttered, "Because I'm not watching *Star Crash*, or any of these others..."

"*The Thing*, I heard that a great thriller...and..." Nancy went down a hallway, opened a closet and pulled out a long, thin box, "We've got *Monopoly* too..." Nancy said, putting the game on the dining room table, "And, why don't we make this more interesting..." Nancy went to a cabinet in the kitchen, opened it, and pull out a half empty bottle of rum, "My dad won't even remember he brought this anyway..." Steve let up a cheer as he went and grabbed some glasses.

They played, watched, and drank for a while. And soon the rum was gone, and the movie was drawing them in more than the game, and at several moments, a partially drunken Nancy turned her head in horror at moments of alien assimilation and reached out for Steve next to her. *Steve*...Jonathan ground his teeth as he watched, then nearly fell out of his chair in terror as the *Thing* clamped down on the arms of a poor doctor.

"Ah! No!" Nancy yelled, hiding her face. Jonathan started to pant as he watched the "Thing" transformed the human into a monstrous shape, and was burned alive by the fearless hero.

"Alright, uh, may...maybe horror...isn't such a good idea anymore..." Steve said, shakily. He got up and turned the TV off, sighing as the show stopped, "Especially since what we've...with Will being..."

"You're right..." Nancy said, throwing back the remnant of her drink, then clearing off the Monopoly board and looking outside, where the sun was still high in the sky, "Why don't we go outside for a bit. Sit by the lake, maybe put our feet in before we lose the day..."

"Good idea..." Steve agreed, "Remind ourselves what summer is like..." Steve said, going into Jonathan and his room. Jonathan followed him, and going to change from his jeans, but as he opened the door, he saw Steve with his pants and boxers at his ankles, naked otherwise.

"Steve...I...sorry..." Jonathan said. His eyes were focused on Steve's manhood, long and dangling as he stepped out of his boxers.

"What are you sorry about?" Steve murmured, turning around and grabbing his trunks. He pulled them on in such a way that Jonathan got a full view of Steve's backside as well, "We're both guys here... besides I saw everything I needed to see of you yesterday..." Steve said, going past Jonathan and giving him a pat on his back. Jonathan watched him, tried to get the image of the naked Steve out of his head for a few moments, then shut the door and changed quickly to his own trunks. By the time he got back out, Steve was pulling out a six pack of beer from the fridge, and Nancy was laying out towels outside. Jonathan took one of Steve's beers, then went out to a rock, and put his feet into the lake. Nancy put her feet in near him, and

Steve got between the two and handed Nancy a beer.

"You feeling the drink Byers?" Steve asked. Jonathan shrugged.

"I'm good..."

"Well, I'm not..." Steve grumbled, then opened the beer, "I'm starting to see double and this water feels weird on my feet..." Jonathan looked down and then noticed that Steve was right. The water seemed to be twirling strangely around his feet. And he started to lean forward too far as he stared at the water, so much so that Nancy had to throw out a hand to stop him from falling in.

"Maybe...maybe this should be our last one..." Nancy said, trying to stifle a burp. She nearly jumped out of her skin as a fish slid past the water around her feet.

"Watch out Nance...the "Thing" can impersonate creatures perfectly. Including fish!" Steve said, grabbing her arms. He got a punch in the neck for this, which Jonathan inexplicably found hilarious.

"Shut up Steve!" Nancy ordered, then laid back and turned her head to Jonathan. The alcohol was making her smile wider and her face even more attractive. Jonathan looked at her, her bright smile and warm face, and felt horrible regret. She had used to look at him like that all the time, for the short time that they were together. And he had messed it up. Steve and her had broken up over him last year. She had broken up with Jonathan earlier this year. Because she couldn't give herself completely to him. And now, they were all here. Nancy smiled at him a while longer, then held out a hand to Jonathan.

"You got your camera?"

"Yeah...I can get it..." Jonathan said.

"Why don't you go capture some true beauty..." Nancy said with a smile. Jonathan nodded, then got up and moved to the house, feeling a lot better. He returned quickly, and held up the camera to get a perfect shot of Steve. *Steve? I'm suppose to be taking a picture of Nancy!* Jonathan turned red and shook his head, *this has to be the alcohol...*

"You got my good side Byers?" Steve asked, smiling in a way that suggested he wasn't that concerned about it. He put his hand around Nancy and Jonathan took them both together.

"Alright, let me see it..." Nancy said, taking the camera roughly from Jonathan, "And hold still you two..." she took a picture of both of the boys, standing awkwardly close to one another. Steve eyed Jonathan, then pulled him down back toward the water next to him.

"Let's give her a better picture..." Steve said. Nancy took another, then another. She smiled at Steve, put down the camera, and sat down in front of them.

"I wish there was a way to take all of us, without having someone else do it..." Nancy said. Then, she started tracing her finger up Steve's shoulder. Perhaps it was playful, perhaps it was involuntary, perhaps it was the drink, but it caused Jonathan to summon a dark thought he'd had before. About the reason behind Nancy and Jonathan's breakup. The same dark thought he'd tried to deny, or ignore, or explain away. But, Jonathan had been drinking, and as he took a drink of his beer, it was enough to give him the burst of courage he needed.

"Nance...I have to ask you something..." Jonathan started, trying his best to stay dedicated. He took another swig, then looked at Steve, whose quizzical look actually gave him even more courage.

"What?" Nancy's smile faded as she drew her hand back, while Steve leaned in his face toward Jonathan. Much too close.

"Yeah, Byers, why the serious tone?"

"Nancy...did...did you break up with me...because you still liked Steve?" Jonathan asked. Nancy's eyes grew wide, then she bit her lip. The way she did when she didn't want to answer.

"Wha...Byers...what kind of question is that?" Steve asked in disbelief, and glancing between the two. He took a swig of his own beer, then looked at Nancy, who tried to avert her gaze. Jonathan pulled himself from the water and decided he was going to see it through.

"Nancy...did you leave me..."

"Jonathan..." Nancy started, biting her lip even harder, "I...I... can't..."

"Just say it...It's okay..." Jonathan said, dropping his gaze. *It would be okay*, he thought. It was fun, being with Nancy when he was, and being Steve's friend...but Jonathan had spent most his life in his shell. His quiet, dark place where he said little and interacted with few people outside of Will. He'd go back there and just dream of his days with Nancy...and with Steve. *Nancy and Steve?* Jonathan put a hand on his head to try and drive out those drunkenly queer thoughts that were interrupting his reconciling with Nancy.

"I...yes...I still...I..." Nancy struggled, then she turned to Steve, who looked down at her with the angriest stare Jonathan had ever seen.

"What? Nance! Did you just say yes?"

"I...Steve..."

"No, no, Nancy, you don't get to do that!" Steve grunted, turning to Jonathan. *That is not what I expected...* he thought.

"So what?" Steve continued, "You leave me for Byers...crush me, destroy me, and leave me to pick myself up...then you do the same damn thing to Byers for me?" Steve yelled, then leaned over to Jonathan and put a hand on his shoulder.

"I'm sorry you ever had to be with that b*tch...but now we see what she really thinks of us...play things..." Steve grunted, glancing back at her, then stood up shakily and stomped back toward the house. Nancy stood, then looked at Jonathan, who dropped his gaze and walked back into the house behind Steve. Somehow...he felt good about Steve saying that. What Jonathan was probably thinking, but of course would never say out loud. Jonathan wasn't two steps into the door before Nancy followed them in, trying to explain herself.

"Steve, Jonathan, wait. I know that it's confusing. It's confusing for me too, but I...I can't give you both what you..."

"So...what? We both lose?" Steve grunted from he and Jonathan's

room, where he was probably changing back into his pants. Jonathan started toward him, grabbing a shirt to put on but Nancy grabbed his arm.

"Listen to me, Jonathan...I couldn't be with you, not completely, without thinking about Steve. And it was the same when I was with him..." Nancy said, "I...I don't know what's wrong with me...but I...I want...both of you..."

"Make a choice Nancy! Because I...I don't know if I want to share..." Steve started, leaning out of his room and signaling to Jonathan. Jonathan looked down a few seconds then looked at Nancy. *Sharing... that was an idea.*

"I don't mind sharing..." Jonathan said suddenly.

"I...what?" Nancy's eyes grew wide again, then looked from Jonathan to Steve.

"I don't mind Nance. I love you. I still do. If you need Steve sometimes...I think I could understand..." Jonathan said, speaking his heart. Or his drunken thoughts. He really did care for Nancy enough that he didn't mind her being with Steve too. And...if Steve just happened to start seeing him more as well...

"Okay, Byers, but I don't know if I'm feeling so generous..." Steve countered, trying to speak through his anger. He burst from their room with only jeans and socks on, "Do you love us Nancy? Because I loved you. And it sure sounds like Byers still does. But when I told you, you said it was bullsh*t!" Steve leaned in to her, and growled, "Bullsh*t!"

"Steve...I..."

"Then, you left him...for me" Steve pointed at himself, then threw his hands up, "Fine. Say it. Say you love me then. Or say you love him. Say it!" Steve roared. Nancy drew back, then, Jonathan heard it. Something that started like a gentle knocking, but it soon became a banging near the window. The three teenagers turned to the window slowly, and saw that as the outside light was starting to fade, something was trying to get in through the window. Nancy jumped

for a hunting rifle set in one of the cabinets and Steve rushed to his room and returned with his bat. Jonathan dropped his shirt and remained frozen in terror, hoping the others would be able to handle it, whatever it was. A Demogorgon? One of the Mind Flayers servants? The *Thing*?

"Nancy, stay back..." Steve ordered, holding up his bat. Nancy put the rifle's barrel over one of his shoulders and grimaced.

"Don't move to fast, Steve..."

"What should I..." Jonathan asked.

"Stay still!" Steve and Nancy yelled at once. Then, the window creaked open slowly. The tension was so high and horrible, Jonathan thought he might puke just from fear and stress. Then, a small black hand reached through the opening.

"What is it?" Steve asked. Then, Nancy dropped her rifle and sighed.

"Look guys..." the black hand was followed by grey fur, and a racoon's head poked through the opening. Steve dropped his bat and Jonathan let out a deep breath. The creature looked at the three teenagers, then made a small purring noise. Steve looked it over, then frowned darkly.

"A racoon...a f*cking racoon..." Steve muttered, then moved over casually to the creature, talking to it like it was his old friend, "You know, buddy...you scared me, and the others...bad...And I'd never hurt Nancy...or Byers..." Steve looked at the two, then turned back to the creature, "But I'm real mad right now. And you...you're a perfect target to take my rage out on!" Steve rushed at the racoon and barely missed in what was a drunken swing. The racoon turned to the woods, but Steve was out the door in a heartbeat, chasing the creature. Nancy and Jonathan raced after him, calling for him. Unfortunately, they were all drunk.

"Steve! Wait! Hold on!" Jonathan yelled, panting heavily and tripping over more thickets and roots than he should have been. He was doing better than Nancy, who totally faceplanted after one bush, and was far behind him by the time Jonathan found Steve with his bat stuck

in a tree. Steve was trying to pry it loose, and cursing out the rodent when Jonathan rushed him, knocking him to the ground and trying to hold him still. In the struggle, Steve ended up on top of Jonathan, and had his hands pressed into Jonathan's. In fact, his fingers were interlocked with Jonathan's. Both boys looked at each other, then at their hands before Jonathan jerked himself free and got back on top of Steve. Now, he was holding Steve by the wrist with his left hand. But their right hands were still interlocked.

"I...Steve! Calm down!"

"That sh*tty little vermin has to die Byers!" Steve roared.

"It didn't do anything to you, Steve! It's a harmless animal!" Jonathan yelled, then turned to see Nancy approaching. The girl was crying and panting.

"This is all my fault...because I...I can't...I love you both..." Steve eyed her, then looked back at Jonathan and his hand. Then, Steve's eyes wandered to Jonathan's crotch. Jonathan followed Steve's gaze looked down to see that despite his drinks, being on top of Steve and touching him had made Jonathan hard, and it was pressing through his swim trunks.

"I...Steve...I drank..." Jonathan tried. *Why was he so quick to defend himself? So, he was hard, it didn't mean it was about Steve...* Jonathan knew he was kidding himself and just gulped as Steve glanced from Jonathan's crotch to his face and the bangs that were hanging down off his face.

"So did I..." Steve said slowly. *Why was this happening? Why was everything going so wrong?* Jonathan thought as he felt his face flushing, probably turning bright red, so embarrassed, so afraid of what Steve would think. Steve's eyes grew wide suddenly, then a small smile slipped on his face. Jonathan tried to get himself under control, to turn his mind away to US states, or capitals or his grandmother, but his traitorous thoughts took him back to his room, when he saw the naked Steve, with his pants around his ankles, and he probably got even harder.

"Byers...I knew it..."

"Steve...I...Steve..." Jonathan struggled. Steve wriggled him from under Jonathan, then went to Nancy.

"Turns out, Nance...you may not have to choose..."

"Wha...why? What do you mean?" Steve turned around and moved to Jonathan. The last time he'd looked at Jonathan like that was when Nancy and Jonathan had broken up, and Jonathan had told him about it. But there was something else here to.

"Tell me to stop..." Steve ordered as he got close to Jonathan. Jonathan could smell the alcohol on his breath, the mix of beer and rum that was both repugnant and alluring at the same time. Then, Steve's hand gripped Jonathan's lower back. Jonathan's felt his face flush even more, and had to imagine he looked like a beet as he tried to draw his gaze away. He started to move his head back, but something was pulling him...pulling him closer to Steve. Was it the alcohol? Or was it that desire that had always been there...

"Do it...tell me to stop..." Steve said, leaning in to Jonathan's face. Jonathan tried to breath, tried to move, tried to react, but felt like his whole body was stiff, frozen in place. Then, it seemed like he was watching himself, watching a movie as Steve's lips met his. His eyes fluttered closed for a few seconds, then they burst open and he looked at Nancy, who was just as shocked as he was.

"I...you...you two..."

"Well, Nancy..." Steve said, letting his hand slip to grab Jonathan's backside, "Is this what you want?" Steve said. He slipped his other hand around Jonathan's face, and was about to pull him in again, but Nancy's hand grabbed Steve's arm, then her other grabbed Jonathan's shoulder.

"Yes...it is...more than you know..." Nancy said, leaning forward and pressing her face into Jonathan's, then letting go and kissing Steve. Then, the madness that was lust seized the three of them, and they were kissing, touching and grasping for each other out in the woods. It seemed more natural than Jonathan thought a three way might have been, and soon Nancy was pulling the two back toward the cabin. The sun was just starting to set, and Jonathan knew they had

just enough time before the boys and Mr. Wheeler returned.

"Come here..." Steve said, desire dripping from his voice as he gripped Jonathan's wrist with one hand and pulled Nancy with his other hand. He pushed through the door and they crashed into two walls, a bookcase and a drawer in their aggressive three-way kissing and touching before they ended up at the door of Steve and Jonathan's bedroom. Jonathan stopped himself and looked at the bed. The same bed Steve and he had already shared two nights. Now, they would both get their wish, to bring Nancy into the bed with them.

"Hold still..." Steve said after he pulled Jonathan into the room. Jonathan looked down to see Steve was on his knees, starting to undo the tie on Jonathan's trunks. Nancy, meanwhile, pushed the door closed as Jonathan's trunks were undone, then, rather brashly, Steve pulled them down, completely revealing Jonathan to the others. *I'm the naked one? I'm the exposed one?* Jonathan swallowed hard as Steve started to kiss his thighs, while Nancy started to run her fingers up his other leg.

"This is it...I'm about to...with two people...the two people, I always..." Jonathan murmured, trailing off. Nancy paused a moment, then continued tracing his outline.

"I've dreamed of do this...a long time..." Nancy admitted, then looked at Steve, "See you two...like this. But Steve...how long..." Nancy asked, almost lazily tracing her fingers up to Jonathan's business. Steve stopped his kisses to look at her, an eyebrow raised.

"How long what?"

"How long have you liked him? Like really liked him?" Jonathan looked down at the older teen, who smiled, then opened his mouth wide, just below Jonathan's member.

"Since the camera incident. Since he kicked my *ss..." Steve said, then took almost all of Jonathan into his mouth. Jonathan could only groan as Steve's lips surrounded and slipped up and down him. Nancy watched for a few seconds, probably trying to register what was happening, then looked up at Jonathan.

"And you?"

"I...I just..." Jonathan started, then moaned in pleasure. He was having a hard time thinking about anything but Steve's mouth around his d*ck.

"Jonathan..." Nancy started, standing up and starting to undo her top strap, "I'm not dumb. This just wouldn't happen. How long have you been...thinking about..." Nancy looked down, then twisted her fingers around Steve's hair. Jonathan bit a knuckle, fighting back another moan.

"First time...I saw him..." Jonathan admitted. He hadn't even been totally aware of that before this moment, but now, it was painfully obvious. He'd been hoping this would happen for a long time too. Steve smiled at Jonathan's comment, then slipped his mouth back around Jonathan's part and made his smooth motions up and down Jonathan's member. It wasn't perfect...Nancy was defiantly better at it. But Steve Harrington was actually sucking him off! *King Steve Harrington!*

"Enough Steve..." Nancy said, dropping back to her knees, "We have to share..."

"I told you..." Steve said, slipping free from Jonathan and pulling Nancy close, "I don't want to share..."

Lucas's eyes burst open when he heard the sound of the cabin door slam and the sound of figures moving violently through the house. He'd been on the boat with Will and Mike when he'd fallen in, gulped down too much lake water and hurt his stomach. Mr. Wheeler took him back, and he'd promised he'd be okay, snuck past the three drinking teenagers who were watching their movie and laid down in his, Will, and Mike's room on his sleeping bag. He'd drifted in and out of sleep throughout them watching the movie and heard them go outside, but still felt too sick and tired to go see them. There was the sound of some angry yelling after, and he'd heard someone run in and out of a room, but he still didn't say anything until he heard the banging in the house. Lucas got up, trying to swallow back the sickness in his stomach, then drew his wrist-rocket. Ill or not, he'd

fight off the intruder, bugler, Demogorgon, or whatever. However, Lucas was not ready for what he saw when he cracked his door open.

"Steve?" Lucas questioned under his breath, as a shirtless Steve had a Nancy in a swimsuit pressed into a wall, clearly locking lips with her. His eyes grew wider and his shock heightened as Steve drew back for a moment, then pulled the swim suit wearing Jonathan to him and their faces met too.

"What...what are they...doing?" Lucas watched the three of them fall all over themselves into Jonathan and Steve's bedroom. Someone tried to close the door, but it wasn't complete, and there was a small slither of light Lucas could see from the room. Lucas moved toward the door slowly, trying to process what the teenagers might possibly be doing, then very gently put his eye into the door. Lucas gasped, and had to bite his fingers to keep from screaming as he saw Jonathan, naked, with Nancy stroking his leg with one hand while Steve had his mouth on...*Steve!* Lucas drew back from the door and went quickly into his room and put his face into his pillow, trying to forget what he saw. Steve...Steve was a boy! And Jonathan...but Nancy was there too! Lucas tried to think about something else, anything else, but that image was stuck in his head. Jonathan and Steve and Nancy...

"Share, you jerk!" Lucas heard Nancy yell, then the sound of someone being pressed onto the bed. Lucas tried not to imagine it, but he could see it in excruciating detail. *Steve's mouth...around, on... touching...Jonathan's...* Lucas pushed his face harder into the pillow. *Why? Why would anyone want this?*

Why hadn't Jonathan asked for this sooner? He was intertwined on the bed with Nancy and Steve, their naked bodies pressed into one another. Steve was in the middle, but Jonathan only had to crane his neck to meet Nancy's lips, and was gently exploring Steve's neck and back with his kisses. Steve, meanwhile, was clearly interested in their sexes, as he had one hand exploring the space between Nancy's legs and another moving up and down Jonathan's shaft.

"This is...real..." Jonathan whispered, his hand fumbling for Steve's member. Steve smiled back at him, then put a hand on Jonathan's

chest, pushing him back.

"Yeah, it is..." Steve adjusted himself to be on top of Jonathan, and gave a wicked smile, "Nancy, in my bag...there are two condoms..."

"Wha...Steve!" Nancy said, stunned. Steve looked at her and bounced his eyebrows.

"I always make sure I'm ready Nancy...besides...they tell us fags, like Byers and me here, that we got to wear these things or die from some horrible disease, like those people in the *Thing*...plus...if we both had sex with you, and you had a little one...who'd know who the father was?" Steve let out a laugh. Jonathan saw Nancy smile, then she rolled off the bed and start for Steve's bag.

"Steve...I uh..." Jonathan swallowed hard, and tried to keep from blushing as Nancy dug around Steve's bag grumbling and drew two small, thin aluminum squares. He'd wanted this for a long time...but...was he ready for all of it?

"You know what to do with this?" Steve asked, taking one and opening it with his teeth. Jonathan stared at him, then looked at Nancy.

"Well, Nance...we...didn't..." Jonathan started, then Steve gave him a hard look.

"What? You just went at Nancy, nothing on? You could have put a kid in her, you know that dummy?"

"He...finished...on my..." Nancy signaled to her lower regions, which made Steve grin.

"Hah...Byers...of course he did," Steve opened the condom, but Jonathan grabbed Steve's wrist.

"Wait, Steve...I...I don't know if I want...If I'm ready for your...in me..." Jonathan struggled out, feeling himself stiffen up like a board. He'd thought about it. Especially in the late nights, when his mind wandered back to those thoughts he'd been told by his father as a child were terrible, horrible things. But Jonathan didn't feel ready for that. Nor did he know exactly what to do. He hadn't done a lot of...

well...

Steve raised an eyebrow as he looked at the part-curious, part-terrified Jonathan, then just laughed and leaned forward.

"Oh, Byers...I think you'll be ready for this..." Steve leaned back, and put the condom on Jonathan.

"Wha...Steve?"

"When you had me on the ground, when we fought that Demogorgon together...I knew I liked some boys, or at least you, Byers. And... well...I got a cousin who's a queer sometimes too...and...he told me how to practice ..." Steve said, then slowly came down onto Jonathan, arching his back. Both boys groaned in response, though Jonathan felt his was ten times louder than Steve. He looked Steve over, the boy, sitting on his member, and couldn't help but call out in pleasure. Jonathan then turned his head to Nancy, who didn't look like she could handle too many more surprises. But she was really biting her lip, and she started to trace along Jonathan's chest until her hand reached Steve.

"This...Steve..." Jonathan began to pant as Steve moved up and down on Jonathan. Steve was groaning, probably too loudly, and Jonathan reached up for him to try and quiet him, but his hands seemed to move by themselves, tracing along Steve's figure and exploring his body. And soon, he was nearly yelling himself.

"St...Steve!" Jonathan roared.

"Jonathan..." Steve uttered, much quieter, then threw his head back and moaned, "Damn..."

"Steve...Jonathan..." Nancy muttered, then her mouth was around Steve as he was on Jonathan. It was unreal, beyond exciting, and Jonathan's mind couldn't help but slip back to his father. And the way he'd tried to fix Jonathan. He heard it in his mind, *"My son won't be a fag! You don't touch boys that way!"* and felt the slap across his face and the tears that streamed down when he cowered from the man. Jonathan thought about drawing back or cowering in that moment, but the pleasure of Steve and Nancy overwhelmed his fear

and instead, he gripped the sheets around him tightly and cried out as he orgasmed. Steve slowed down on Jonathan's shaft as the younger boy started to pant.

"There..." Steve said, smiling widely, "That wasn't so bad...actually... that felt pretty good...and it was..."

"Just the start..." Nancy said, pulling Steve off Jonathan and pushing him onto his back. She took out the second condom, opened it and put it on Steve and was soon sliding up and down him as Jonathan watched.

"Byers...you're not gonna help?" Steve asked, running a hand through Jonathan's hair, then letting out a loud groan. Jonathan, sat up, and kissed Nancy for a while, then felt his hand slip to her crotch. He stroked her around the area until she grabbed his hand and put his fingers at a particular spot. A spot Jonathan certainly couldn't have found on his own.

"Here..." Nancy said, then sighed and gasped as Steve thrust and Jonathan stroked. Nancy began to breath heavily, in a way she had only ever once for Jonathan, then grabbed Steve's shoulder with one hand and Jonathan's with another and screamed. Straight screamed. Jonathan drew back, and Nancy turned red from embarrassment, but Steve—the ever-smooth Steve—leaned forward and gave her a wide, devilish smile.

"Best you've ever had, huh?" Steve said, giving her a playful slap on the buttock, then reached over and slapped Jonathan's backside too, "Best any of us ever had! Even if it was only about 15 minutes..."

"Oh my god...what if...someone heard..." Nancy murmured, still red as a tomato. Jonathan swallowed and shook his head.

"The boat isn't back yet. And we're in a cabin surrounded by woods on both sides..." Jonathan offered.

"I suppose..." Nancy said, turning slightly paler. She looked at Steve, who seemed awfully smug.

"Steve...did you..."

"I let out a long sigh while you were crying out. That's all I needed..." Steve said, putting his hands behind his head, "But you and Byers are something. All that yelling and grunting. You two need to learn how to do this a little quieter...for the next time when we're not in the middle of nowhere..." Nancy slapped him in the chest, then slipped off him and squeezed between the two boys.

"Oh...Steve...can we even do this again? Can we...make this work..." Nancy signaled to Steve and Jonathan.

"I'm...willing to share..." Jonathan said again, wrapping an arm around Nancy, and reaching his other hand for Steve. Steve let Jonathan's fingers go through his slick, well-manicured and beautiful hair. Nancy smiled at Jonathan, then turned to Steve.

"I am too...but...can you?" Nancy asked. Steve smiled at her, then leaned down and planted a kiss on her lips.

"I guess I can make an exception, just this once..." Steve said, then frowned, "But...let's agree...we've got to keep this a secret..."

"Oh yeah," Nancy said, "If Ally, or Lucy...or Laurie heard..."

"Or Billy or Tommy, or any of the basketball team..." Steve muttered.

"Or Will or Mike or...Lucas..." Jonathan offered, *Or my father...*

"So, this is our secret..." Steve said, turning on his front and looking up and down Jonathan and Nancy, "The best secret I've ever kept..."

Will noticed there was something about his brother. Something different. He seemed happier, more excited as Mr. Wheeler set down three pizza's he ordered and asked what they wanted to drink. Nancy did to, biting her lips randomly and her eyes fluttering at strange intervals. Even Steve seemed more excited, cracking jokes with Mr. Wheeler, and talking excitedly with Mike and Will about their boat trip. They hadn't mentioned that Lucas went back early, but it didn't seem like Lucas wanted them to, as their friend was giving cold looks at Steve and glancing at Will and Mike uncomfortably.

"You heard this one Steve..." Mr. Wheeler asked, sitting down at the

end and picking up a slice, "A ham sandwich walks in a bar..."

"Dad!" Mike groaned, "You tell this one all the time..."

"No, I haven't heard it, come on, Mr. Wheeler..." Steve said. Mr. Wheeler held up his arms, as if the joke might knock if him over if he wasn't careful.

"So, it goes up to the bartender and orders a beer. And the bartender says, we don't serve food here!" Mr. Wheeler finished. Steve started to laugh loudly. Nancy chuckled and even Jonathan cracked a smile. Will knew at that moment something was up. That wasn't funny.

"Hey, Will, are you gonna eat?" Jonathan asked, genuine concern starting to build on his face. Will eyed him, trying to figure out what was going on, then looked at his choices. Cheese, sausage, and pepperoni. Despite Mike and Nancy's dramatic experiences, Mr. Wheeler remained awfully boring.

"Yeah, and what about you Lucas? You look like you've seen a ghost..." Mike asked to their friend sitting opposite Steve. Lucas looked at Mike a moment, then turned back to Steve.

"Yeah, Lucas, that's what Will's supposed to look like..." Steve said, then held his hands up, "Sorry, that joke was totally out of line..."

"No...it's fine..." Will said, taking a slice of cheese, "But Lucas...are you okay, does your stomach still...?"

"Yes, I'm still...you know, Mike, Will, can we talk..." Lucas said, glaring at Steve again.

"About what?" Steve asked, leaning forward, clearly a little agitated with Lucas, "Why those dark stares? And what's the big secret that the three of us wouldn't know about..." Steve said, signaling to Jonathan and Nancy with a lazy wave as he grabbed a slice of sausage. Lucas stared at Steve for a long time, then cleared his throat.

"My stomach feels a lot better now, Will, since I had a nice long nap, back here, in the cabin, about midday!" Lucas said loudly. Steve dropped the pizza he was holding, Nancy seemed to fall onto the table and Jonathan started choking on the pepperoni slice he was

eating.

"Mid...day..." Steve uttered. Nancy tried to calmly lean back and wipe down her face with a napkin, but was starting to breath heavily. Jonathan, meanwhile, was still choking and coughing hard.

"Jonathan," Mr. Wheeler started, "Are you alright, son? You need some water?"

"Yeah...Mr...ahem..." Jonathan got up, and went to the cabinets and fridge. Steve cleared his throat, then looked at Lucas.

"Did you not see us? Say...hello...?" Steve said, uttering the words through gritted teeth.

"No, I didn't want to disturb you guys..." Lucas said. Jonathan started coughing even louder from where he was by the fridge, Nancy bit her lip hard and Steve rolled his shoulders, clearly trying to suppress anger.

"Disturb us...from...what?" Nancy asked, shakily. Lucas looked at her, then smiled.

"The movie you were watching. It looked really scary anyway. I just went to sleep. I thought I heard you guys go outside a few times... and something that sounded like..."

"A racoon. A racoon broke in!" Nancy yelled, sitting up, then pointed at Steve, "We thought it was something worse..."

"Worse?" Mr. Wheeler asked, raising an eyebrow, "What in the world did you expect to break into the house? But, Nance, a racoon got in?"

"Yeah..." Steve said, talking a lot faster than normal, "Byers and Nancy there were real worried about it. We had to chase it down, and...Mr. Wheeler, you should have heard Nancy scream!"

"Yeah, well, it was real scary, just this black hand pushing open our window..." Nancy said, "I wasn't the only one screaming either..."

"I admit, I cried out too, twice in fact!" Jonathan called through his coughing near the fridge, "Plus...hack*...the thing burst into the

house a second time!"

"Yeah, Steve tried to chase it away the first time, but it came back, and scared all of us so bad...we...we..." Nancy trailed off, her eyes growing wide.

"Screamed, together!" Steve finished quickly, "We were in our bathing suits too. And it ran into me and Byers room for a minute and I chased it down with my bat, but it got away through another window. It was real bad, Mr. Wheeler..."

"That sounds terrible. Well, next time that little sucker tries to break in, you have my permission to get rid of him, Steve and Jonathan..." Mr. Wheeler said, then adjusted his glasses and started to cut the pizza in front of him with a fork and knife.

"Thank you, Mr. Wheeler..." Steve said, then glared back at Lucas, who continued to eye Steve darkly.

"I guess that explains the ruckus I heard..." Lucas said, "And the broken glass..."

"Broken glass?" Mr. Wheeler asked. Steve, Nancy and Jonathan looked at each other again, this time with less concern but there was still terror there. Will thought he'd figured out what the issue was.

"We...uh...got some sodas..." Steve said, "And the racoon, the swinging the bat..."

"We cleaned it up..." Jonathan added, finally down to a soft wheezing, "We made sure to get rid of all the remains..."

"Oh, then that might explain it. Steve, just be honest with me, son... did you happen to hit my bottle of Myers Rum?" Mr. Wheeler said, "Because I could have sworn I had at least half a bottle..."

"You know what, Mr. Wheeler..." Steve started, clearly about to admit, but then Nancy jumped it.

"That one was my fault, Dad. I knocked it over when the racoon scared me. I'm so sorry..." Nancy started to put out her lip and tried to look apologetic. Tried to. Will wasn't buying it at all. Mr. Wheeler

cleared his throat, then stood and went over to his daughter.

"It's alright Nance. I was hoping to get rid of that bottle anyway. It was about as close to expired as rum can get, and I know the racoon was disturbing. Let's keep that a secret from your mothers though..." Mr. Wheeler said, looking around the room. Steve, Nancy, and Jonathan forced smiles at him and nodded, but Lucas' grin was ear to ear.

"Oh, don't worry, I'm real good at keeping secrets...Mr. Wheeler..." Lucas said, though Will suspected he was speaking more to Jonathan, Nancy, and Steve.

Thanks for reading, and hope you enjoyed! Comments and suggestions are always welcome, and get ready for the fallout in the next chapter!

4. Chapter 4

Strange in the Cabin 4

Keeping Secrets

Steve took a few more steps down the pathway, looked all around him again, then turned to Nancy and Jonathan behind him.

"He...Lucas...that f*cker...f*ck!"

"He had to have heard us Steve!" Nancy said, putting her head in her hands, "I screamed so loud..."

"He might not have understood it. He did only just leave middle school...besides, once he heard you—or me—scream, wouldn't he have come into the room?" Jonathan considered.

"Unless he was scared..." Nancy muttered, still bright red. Steve snorted at the idea.

"Or scarred...That son of b*tch. This is going to ruin us..."

"Wait...wait...maybe...even if he knows, he might keep the secret..." Nancy suggested, trying to slow her breathing.

"For a while, maybe. But, what if some comment slips out when he's talking to Dustin? Or Max? One of them clearly told on us being here at the lakehouse to Hargrove. How long until he finds out and..." Steve ran his fingers through his hair angrily, then turned to Nancy, who was still clearly trying to see the positive.

"What's...what could really happen?" Nancy asked, trying to put optimism in her voice., "I mean...you're going to IU..."

"With Tommy!" Steve grimaced, then groaned in frustration and eyed Jonathan, "Byers, you and I would be known as the town fags, at best. And Nancy...how did Hargrove describe it, being skewered?"

"But, Steve, Lucas might not actually understand what happened. I

mean, he might not even know..." Jonathan tried to make a sign with his hands, which Steve suspected wasn't supposed to be that vulgar but ended up coming out that way. And was surprisingly close to the ASL sign for "intercourse." Steve eyed him, then signed out the word properly.

"Jonathan watch. This is how you say sex in sign language..." Steve made the sign for "all, then "intercourse" again, "We can refer to... what we do this way..." Jonathan and Nancy stared at him for a few seconds, then Nancy raised an eyebrow.

"Why do you know sign language?"

"Because, my cousin is deaf. The one who is a...a queer..." Steve muttered, then looked at Jonathan, "It was one of my electives...and about the only class I ever got an A in...anyway, if Lucas does know...anything, we need to make clear to him how important it is, no one finds out..." Steve groaned, "God, if my mom or dad found out..."

"Or my parents..." Nancy murmured, then looked at Jonathan, who lowered his head.

"I...sorry..." Jonathan offered. Steve sighed and put his hands in his pockets.

"Byers, it's not your fault your mom is cool. In fact, if all this goes sideways, she might be the one to talk to..." Jonathan looked at him, then nodded in support, then Steve cleared his throat.

"Alright, guys, let's stick with our story, about the racoon. And Lucas needs to keep it quiet, no matter what he thinks happened about... with..." Steve signed again, and Nancy and Jonathan nodded. Steve turned back to the cabin, hoping, really hoping, Lucas was mistaken what had happened. Jonathan walked next to Steve, and Nancy followed behind more slowly.

"You still want to try this...us," Steve signaled to Jonathan, signing unconsciously. Jonathan watched him, not really understanding then glanced back at Nancy.

"Even though...this might happen?" Jonathan finished, then sighed and looked up at Steve, "Yeah. I still do..."

"Good...me too..." Steve grabbed Jonathan's hand, gave it a squeeze, then continued. Eventually, they came out into the clearing near the cabin, but as Steve came out into the moon and star lit clearing, he saw the three boys standing in a row in front of the house. The moonlight was reflecting beautifully of the gentle waves that slid along the nearby lake and Steve cleared his throat and took the lead as he saw them.

"Hey, munchkins, we need to talk...about..." Steve started, then trialed off as he saw Lucas grinning ear to ear, "Sh*t..." Steve muttered. He looked back at a horrified Nancy and a morose Jonathan. Steve could see Mike was smiling widely to Lucas' left, and Will had a curious smirk on his face as he stood to the right.

"Yeah...we're gonna talk..." Lucas said, "And we're going to tell you guys how this is going to work..."

Will leaned out of the window as Jonathan's car pulled up to the arcade. He opened the door and jumped out, then turned and saw Steve's BMW pull up, and Mike and Lucas get out of his back seat.

"Oh, man...arcade trip, for free..." Mike said.

"It ain't free!" Steve yelled as he got out of his car and slammed his door shut. Will looked back at Jonathan, who had seemed on the verge of saying something to Will the whole ride, but didn't. He wasn't going to make Jonathan talk if he didn't want to though, and instead turned back to Mike and Lucas.

"What are we gonna play?"

"Something special to start..." Lucas said, turning to the older teenagers, "We're going to have a bit of a competition...a fun game... with them..." Lucas pointed to Steve, Nancy and Jonathan.

"What's the game?" Steve spat. Nancy put a hand on his arm and eyed Mike.

"What are you going to make us do?"

"Lucas..." Mike said, holding out a hand. Lucas led the group into the arcade and to a game Will recognized and loved. *Galaga*. But this was slightly different. A two-player battle galaga, where competitors faced endless levels next to each other to see who would win.

"Here's how this will work..." Lucas said, "Three rounds, one of us again one of you...and two out of three wins..."

"And..." Nancy asked, straightening her dress and looking uncomfortable in the arcade.

"If you three win...we forget anything happened, and your secret...is safe with us, we swear it..." Lucas said, rubbing his hands together.

"And...if we lose?" Jonathan asked. Lucas flashed him a toothy smile.

"Your secret is still safe...but, it's going to cost you..." Mike said. He looked at Lucas, who held out a hand.

"First, we get all the money you have on you to use in the arcade as much as we want..."

"And, second, you three have to play Dungeons and Dragons with us tonight...for as long as we say..." Will finished. He was actually excited about the idea of finally having Jonathan play with them. And Steve and Nancy would make it even more crazy and fun, plus, fill out their party. Steve and Nancy gave Lucas and Mike dark looks, but Jonathan cleared his throat and held out a hand to the machine.

"I guess we should get started..."

"Wait...first, let's see that money. All of it!" Mike said, looking particularly at his sister. Nancy gave him a harsh frown, then went in her back pocket and took out four fives and a twenty dollar bill, showing them to Mike. Jonathan reached into his jeans and pull out two tens and showed them to Will. Finally, Steve, looking truly furious, reached into his wallet, and pulled out three twenties and a ten and waved them in front of Lucas.

"My mother gave me extra money for the trip..." Steve spat through

his teeth.

"You mom is so nice...you'll have to thank her for us..." Lucas said with a dark smile. Nancy drew back her money and pointed at Mike.

"You've got to beat us first. That's what you wanted. Let's play!" Nancy ordered.

First up was Steve and Lucas. As soon as the games' opening music started, it was obvious Steve had no idea what he was doing, and his fighter seemed on the verge of blowing up for most of the match, while Lucas handily avoided blasts and dodged shots. Eventually, Steve's inexperience caught up with him, and he crashed head long into an alien vessel.

"God-dammit!" Steve roared, slamming his hands on the device. Lucas threw up his hands in celebration and high-fived both Mike and Will.

"One down, one to go..."

"I got this guys..." Mike said, cracking his knuckles and grabbing his joystick. Nancy, however, looked surprisingly calm, and eyed Mike.

"You know Mike...You might not remember this. But you used to make me come to the arcade all the time when we were younger..." Nancy said. Then, the game began, and all of their group could only stare in awe as Nancy took control of her fighter and made smooth, easy moves to dodge attacks, even better than Mike.

"How..." Mike asked, trying to keep up with the increasing difficulty, "How are you doing that? Are you cheating?" Nancy grimaced as she avoided a projectile, then nudged Mike.

"I'm using the secret lever under the machine, don't you know about that?"

"What lever? What are you talking about?" Mike looked down, under his machine, then his fighter exploded in a loud, pixelated burst.

"Wha....what happened?"

"I won..." Nancy said, turning on her heels and high-fiving Jonathan

and Steve.

"Wha...I...that's not fair!"

"Mike! Come on!" Lucas called.

"She cheated!"

"She *tricked* you..." Lucas said, then both he and Mike turned to Will, who looked at Jonathan.

"Guess it's us..." Jonathan offered.

"No hard feelings..." Will said.

"Of course not..." Jonathan said, rubbing Will's head.

"No for me, Byers, kick your brother's *ss!" Steve yelled. Nancy also seemed to be real into it.

"Don't show any mercy, Jonathan. Think about what's at stake! All our money...and a night wasted on Dungeons and Dragons!"

"Which is why you gotta win Will!" Mike said, giving him a pat on the back.

"Yeah, you got it!" Lucas said. Will went up to the joystick, looked at Jonathan again, then started. Amazingly, it was a fair fight, Will was rusty and Jonathan had clearly been watching and picking up how to play from the others. Steve and Nancy were right next to Jonathan, while Lucas and Mike were at Will's end, and all were cheering the two on. In fact, it started to draw other patrons in the arcade's attention, and soon, a crowd was watching them. Will played his heart out, did everything he could, but he got real close to dying twice and then, just when he thought it'd be over, the world slipped away...

The lights around him brightened, the forms and bodies near him became shimmering colors, including the bright blue, yellow and violet that defined the older teenagers next to him. Will also saw a new mark on his screen. It was hardly more than a few white pixels mixed in with the alien ships at first, then the shape of the Lich

appeared, and began to move in sync with the enemies around him.

"Wha...what?" Will said, drawing back, as the pixelated creature grew larger and larger.

"Will...the...wise...help me...go there..." the creature said with its 2-D mouth, then it turned and started to appear more real as a white skinned hand moved to reach out of the screen.

"No! NO!" Will cried, then there was an explosion, and he was back in the arcade, and Jonathan dropped his head on to the machine.

"Byers!" Steve yelled. Nancy flung up her hands, and Mike and Lucas cheered next to Will.

"You did it. You won!"

"I don't know how!" Nancy said, "Did you even hit something Jonathan? It looked like your ship just blew up..."

"I must have hit something..." Jonathan muttered, then held out a hand to Will, "Good game. I guess I owe you some money..."

"Pay up!" Mike said holding out greedy hands as well. Nancy grimaced as she handed over the money. Jonathan put his tens into Will's hand and smiled weakly at him. Steve, however, looked like he might hurt Lucas as he slowly took out his seventy dollars, and put them roughly into the boys' dark brown palms.

"Thank you," Lucas said, "Now, we're gonna play here until 8:30, then we're going to play Dungeons and Dragons all night..."

"All night..." Steve muttered, then went to a bench in the arcade and sat down, brooding. Nancy sat down to his right, crossed her legs and looked out the window. Jonathan sat down to his left, his hands in his pockets.

"Wow...you really put them in their place Lucas..." Mike said as they started to wander the small Bloomington arcade, "All this over the fact that they were secretly drinking the rum at the cabin..."

"Yeah...well, that's what they get for being so obvious...but, it was

good for us, cause it got us this!" Lucas said, forcing a smile as he held up Steve's money. Will looked at him, then back at the grumpy Steve and Nancy and his truly depressed brother, then back to Lucas. There was more going on than underaged drinking. But he couldn't get into that right now.

"Guys...I saw it again..." Will said, "The Lich. When I was just playing..."

"What do you mean you saw it?" Mike asked, now genuinely concerned. He was always genuinely concerned when Will told him something important. And Will really liked that.

"It was on the screen, like it was in the game. It came out toward me, but then...I think it blew up Jonathan's ship..."

"You're telling me the Lich won that game for us?" Lucas asked. Will looked down and then nodded.

"Yeah...it did. And, like I told you, it helped me with the bullies too..."

"Maybe...maybe the Lich isn't such a bad guy..." Lucas pondered, looking over the money again. Mike shook his head in disbelief.

"It's a Lich, Lucas, it's an evil boss!"

"In Dungeons and Dragons. But everything is not the same as that... the Demogorgon and the Mind Flayer, they weren't..." Mike held up a hand, telling Lucas to wait, then looked at Will.

"When you enter that dimension..." Mike started, looking at Will, "You can see our life forms right? Hearts, minds, desires..." Will looked at him, thought back to it, and nodded.

"Yeah..."

"Okay, then, can you tell, or see or sense what the Lich wants?" Mike asked. Will looked down and thought, as hard as he could. Mike leaned forward slowly and took Will's hand. Whether the motion was involuntary or not, Will's heart began to beat harder as Mike's fingers slipped around his, "Will, can you tell? Do you remember?" Will

squeezed Mike's hand, and thought. But only one thing came to him, the same thing that he'd heard from the beginning.

"It just wants one thing...to go to the Vale of Shadows..." Will said, then looked at his friends, "And I'm the way he's going to go there..."

"How was the arcade fellas?" Mr. Wheeler said, opening the door to let the teenagers and the younger boys in. Jonathan had driven the three boys back, and they gave terse greetings to Mr. Wheelers before they hurried inside and started getting Dungeons and Dragons set up. Jonathan sighed as he watched his brother getting set up, then Mr. Wheeler put a hand on his shoulder.

"Everything alright son? You look...confused..."

"I am, Mr. Wheeler..." Jonathan admitted, then eyed his brother, "But I'm more worried about my brother..." Mr. Wheeler looked at Will, then at Jonathan.

"Is he showing signs of asphyxiation? Because, Joyce told me to call her at the first sign..."

"No, nothing serious...not yet..."

"Well, you know what to do if he does...and, I'm pooped from being on the deck all day," Mr. Wheeler winked, then yawned, "I'll see you all tomorrow. The ladies should be back by the morning...And I won't tell them you stayed up all night if you don't tell my wife I checked in early. Have a good night..." Mr. Wheeler grumbled, then walked toward the master room. Jonathan watched him go, then felt a hand on his shoulder. Steve put an elbow on Jonathan's shoulder and leaned on it, then shook his head.

"Seventy bucks. That kid took seventy bucks!"

"I don't know about this "best" secret. I do know it's one of my most expensive..." Nancy muttered. Jonathan swallowed, then leaned into her ear.

"I still think it's my best. And most enjoyable..."

"Oh...Byers..." Steve grumbled, getting between the two, "Who know you were such a romantic..."

"Hey, come on!" Lucas called, waving at the three, "You owe the second part of the deal..." Steve sighed, then followed Lucas. Nancy looked at Jonathan again, then they went into the boys' room, where the three had set up a card table and snacks to play.

"You are gonna have to start from the beginning with me..." Steve muttered, pulling up one of the dining chairs they had brought it. Just as Mike was about to open his mouth, Nancy sat down and reached for one of the sheets of paper.

"We're playing as generic characters. What do you need for your group, fighters, rogues?" Nancy asked. The boys all stopped what they were doing and stared at her. Nancy rolled her eyes.

"Mike, you used to dress me up for your campaigns, remember?" Nancy muttered. Mike looked at her, dropped his gaze, then pushed a piece of paper at her.

"I...you probably don't remember..." Nancy looked at it, then at Mike.

"This...is..."

"Your old character. You made it a long time ago...And elf ranger..."

"You kept it..."

"Yeah, he even had me sketch it out...though we had to update it slightly..." Will said. Jonathan looked at the touching moment between them, then Will pushed a paper toward him.

"I made one for you. A rogue...he's smart like you, and good with contraptions. He's a human, because...I didn't think..."

"Thank you Will..." Jonathan said. Steve eyed the exchange, then sighed and put his hands in his pockets.

"And what am I doing?" Steve muttered. Lucas gave a big grin, then slammed a piece of paper down in front of him.

"And I made one for you...a dwarf warrior...with perfect hair just like yours...as a gift the last time you drove us around..." Lucas said excitedly, smiling devilishly. Steve picked up the paper and looked over it, then raised an eyebrow.

"My intelligence and wisdom are both 1?"

"Brains aren't his strong suit..." Lucas said, trying to suppress a giggle. Will and Mike didn't do well holding back their laughs though, and Steve growled at Lucas, then waved a hand over the board.

"Whatever. AHow do we start this..."

"Well, we're going to be exploring a special dungeon today..." Mike put up the boards around him that Jonathan suspected defined him as some sort of narrator, "We're doing...the graveyard of death..."

"Graveyard of...isn't a graveyard...already dead?" Nancy asked. Mike eyed her, then put down an opening tile.

"You five adventurers have been tasked by King Horris to find out what has been kidnapping people in this graveyard, and slay whatever it is for a substantial sum..."

"What kind of sum are we talking?" Lucas asked, "Because I want to know how much I'm trying to take into this dungeon...and what it's worth..."

"More or less than 130 bucks?" Steve muttered. Mike grinned and held out his hands.

"Each of your weights in gold...that's what..." Lucas looked down at his character, then nodded in approval.

"Seems fair..."

"I agree..." Will said, smiling. Jonathan looked at his character and then at Mike.

"Wait, I'm small, only 120 pounds?"

"Yeah, well, I'm 100 pounds, so shush..." Steve grunted, "Alright,

we're going into a haunted graveyard, by ourselves, with medieval weapons and vague magic..." Steve picked up the dwarf character and put it on the board. Nancy followed suit with her elf, then Jonathan and Lucas. Only Will didn't move.

"Guys..." Will started, gulping, but Lucas grabbed his wizard and put it on the board.

"Come on, we're trying to play here..." Will's eyes grew wide, then he looked horrified at the five people in the room.

"What?" Jonathan asked, leaning forward, "What's..." before Jonathan could finish, Mike jumped back from his book.

"Wha...what's happening...the pages, are moving!"

"What do you mean they're moving?" Nancy said, standing, but Will held out a hand.

"He's playing..." Will said, looking at Mike, then Lucas.

"Who?" Steve asked. Jonathan tried to reach for Will, but Nancy grabbed his arm and pointed at the board, where a skeleton figure was now on the board.

"Did someone put that there?" Nancy asked. Will looked at Jonathan.

"The Lich...the Lich is playing!" Will said, pointing, "He put that there he's..." then there was the sound of a page rustling, then Mike looked down and read slowly.

"It's...a level two skeleton warrior..." Mike said, "It's shuffling toward you..."

"Well, wherever it came from, we should get rid of it..." Steve said, about to move his character.

"Jonathan has initiative..." Will said. Jonathan swallowed, then pushed his character toward the skeleton warrior.

"I guess I'll attack it..." Jonathan said. He took a die from Will, a really crazy looking twenty sided one, and he rolled. He came up

with a 2, and Mike shook his head.

"Your attack doesn't hit..." Mike said. Then the die moved. On its own. It rolled a few spaces and landed on a twelve.

"What kind of freaky ghost sh*t is this?" Steve demanded. Mike swallowed, then looked at Jonathan, "His counter attack hits..." Jonathan looked down, then felt pain drawn across his arm, from about his shoulder to his elbow, and let out a loud yelp. He pulled up the sleeve on his shirt, and revealed a long red gash on his arm.

"What? When did you get that?" Nancy asked, jumping to her feet. Jonathan looked at it in horror, then Will pointed at the game.

"He...he got you..."

"Oh no you don't!" Nancy yelled, then grabbed her character and adjusted her position to have a line of sight at the skeleton, "Give me that die!" Nancy rolled a nineteen, and then rolled the six sided die to do damage. The skeleton was defeated, and the figure fell down. Will looked at it, then back at those around the table.

"It hurt him! He took damage..."

"But, so can we..." Lucas said.

"What's going on?" Steve demanded, "I'm tired of this ghost stuff being..."

"Will's been having visions," Mike started, "They're of a new monster called the Lich. It wants to go to the Vale of Shadows and hopes to take over Will to do it. He may or may not be on Will's side, but..." Mike paused, and signaled to Jonathan, "I don't think he's on ours..."

"The Lich must only be able to use certain things to interact with our world..." Lucas surmised, "Like the snare, or the arcade game...or... this..."

"Arcade game? It played in the arcade?" Steve asked, then leaned forward and signaled to Jonathan, "Did it destroy Byer's ship in the game? Is that why we lost?"

"I...maybe..." Will said.

"Focus Steve! The Lich wants to get to Will, so, to stop the Lich..." Mike continued.

"We'll have to keep Will safe..." Nancy finished, then looked at Jonathan's arm, "And, since the thing can apparently hurt us in this game, we have to keep everyone alive..." Nancy stood and left the room, then returned with a first aid kit and a bandage for Jonathan. Steve stared at the board for a few moments, then looked at Nancy.

"Is this serious? Some new interdimensional monsters is playing a game with us where we can actually hurt each other?" Steve asked.

"That about sums it up, I think..." Nancy muttered. Steve looked down at the board and sighed.

"You Wheelers and Byers are f***** crazy..."

"Amen..." Lucas muttered. Steve nodded to him, then looked back at the board

"The stuff in the game actually happens to us? And, if I remember what Dustin told me right, you can actually die in this game...like die. So that means..."

"Try not to die..." Lucas said, then looked at Mike, "What's next..." Mike looked down and gulped.

"He's flipping the pages for me. I think I'm suppose to read them..." Mike started, "You begin into the graveyard to find it haunted, and enemies all about. But, there is a clear path. Do you chose to..."

"Yes, yes, let's go!" Steve roared pushing his character forward.

"Okay...You open the door, and move to the next room..." Mike read, then looked up at the tile which represented the underground lair. Will could see that the area in front of them was another dark room tile, and inside, he suspected they'd find another set of enemies. They'd already been through about eight rooms, most of which had undead monsters in them. Steve, of course, had to be told that those

were creatures who had died and were revived by dark magic, like the Lich itself. Moving through the rooms was slow, and slogging through the monsters was even harder. And throughout the battles, they had taken damage. Steve's character had had a bad spite with a ghast, which got him a big gash across his face, and later, two ghouls gave him a black eye. Nancy got a cut along her collar bone from an orc zombie. Lucas had some bruises from being thrown back by a horribly powerful Wight. And Jonathan...

"Look out Jonathan!" Lucas yelled. Jonathan looked down to see a Warhorse Skeleton attack him, which resulted in dice rolling.

"It strikes out at you, but you mostly dodge it..." Jonathan sighed, then grabbed his hand and screamed in pain.

"Jonathan!" Nancy yelled, then took out a bandage from her emergency kit and tied up his hand, "Is it broken?"

"It's not that bad," Jonathan grunted through clenched teeth, "But Steve, you have to get him before we lose our initiative..."

"I got him!" Steve said, rolling the dice. It proved successful, and the Warhorse figurine fell over. Will looked up and saw the Lich standing behind Mike. Every monster they beat hurt him, and the creature grabbed at its chest with long undead fingers and grumbled.

"We're weakening him..." Will said, staring hard at the Lich.

"But he's weakening us..." Nancy said, touching the bandage on her bloody scratch, "Mike, how much longer is this dungeon..."

"At least fifteen more rooms..." Mike said, looking down, "And each with increasingly harder monsters..."

"You got to be kidding me. Mike, we're getting our butts kicked..." Lucas said, gently rubbing his chest. Will looked down sadly, feeling himself loosing hope. Jonathan put his right hand out to touch his brother's shoulder.

"It's alright Will. We'll do what we have to so that we can overcome this thing...and I'll keep you safe, I promise..."

"Is this serious?" Steve yelled out, slamming a hand on the table and eyeing Will with his one good eye, "We're playing an undead, otherworldly monster in a game of Dungeons and Dragons that could kill us, and we're just going to go for it?" Steve asked, then looked at Mike, "You, Wheeler, you're just going to sit there and watch us get beat senseless?"

"I...well..."

"Mike, are you the dungeon ruler or master or whatever, or not?" Mike looked at him, then at the book.

"Yeah, I am..."

"You're the narrator..." Nancy said, looking at Steve with wide eyes, then back at Mike, "You tell the story...so tell it, how you want it!" Mike's eyes grew wide as well, then he looked back at those around him, new determination on his face.

"I am the dungeon master..." Mike slammed his hand on the table and looked at Will.

"You are given a moment of respite. You have the opportunity to search the room!" Mike yelled, looking at Will, who got the gist of Mike's suggestion.

"I search using my discovery spell..."

"I also search...with my ability..." Jonathan added. Mike smiled at him, then pointed.

"Jonathan, you discover a hidden switch, and Will you find the outline of a door in the wall..." A new monster, a half-rotted zombie appeared suddenly in the room, but Mike wasn't having it.

"Well, Jonathan, do you press the button?"

"Yeah, sure..."

"It opens, a trap, which drops the zombie to another level..." Mike said, smacking the figure from the table and looking at Will.

"Well?"

"I try to open the door..."

"It turns out to be a special portal..."

"A special portal...let's take it..."

"Agreed..." Steve said, "Let's go..."

"So, the party takes the portal..." Mike said, then moved the figures through the hole, and then brought out a rather sinister looking board. One that looked like a boss belonged in it...

"You've discovered a secret passage, one which leads you straight to the Lich's throne!" Mike reached down and pulled out a big, terrifying figurine, a tall, white and green robed monster with glowing eyes and slammed it on the table. Will glanced at the figure, then saw it. The Lich was no longer behind Mike. Now, he was in the game. He started to pant as the figurine coming to life and stared at him with cold, green eyes.

"He's here...this is him..." Will said pointing.

"The rules here are simple..." Lucas said, looking at Mike, then Will, "Keep it from touching Will...and he's going to cast a fireball...and burn this monster to the ground!"

"I need a turn to summon it..." Will said, looking down on his sheet.

"Then I'll hold him off!" Steve said, flinging a die. It worked, and Steve struck the Lich, though to minimal effect.

"I'll plant a bomb on him..." Jonathan added.

"And I'll hit him with an arrow..." Nancy called.

"And I'll..." a die suddenly rolled, and Mike looked down.

"Lucas, quick! Roll the twelve sided..." Lucas reached for it and threw it. And it came up with a three.

"Lucas no!" Mike yelled. Lucas' eyes grew wide, then he was flung from the chair and crashed into the wall, then collapsed to the ground. The three teenagers rushed to the boy, but Mike slammed his hand on the table.

"Wait! You need to protect Will!" Jonathan turned swiftly and flung the twelve sided die. It came up as twelve and Mike jumped to his feet.

"You've planted the bomb!" The Lich figurine was knocked to the back of the room, then, Nancy stood and snatched up the die.

"I'm using my strongest arrow...a firestorm arrow!" Nancy said, then rolled out the number she needed. The Lich was pushed even further back, into the corner of the room. It started to move forward, but was too far from Will, and only succeed in getting in range.

"Now!" Mike said, pointing to Will, who pointed dramatically. Then, he saw it. His figurine, the tall, elderly wizard, seemed to shimmer with life. His own life force. Will picked up the die, closed his eyes and smiled.

"I launch a fireball!" the dice roll worked, and as though he was using his wizard figurine's hands, forced out a burst of fire, a powerful blast that careened across the board and smashed into the Lich figurine. The creature erupted in flame and roared as it was burned, then, Will could see the Lich flung out of the game and out of the boys' room. Will smiled as the creature disappeared, then looked back to Lucas, whose lifeforce was now a dim and fading light green. The sky-blue outline of Steve was his head, and caressing him.

"Guys...guys..." Steve said, looked up at Mike, "He's...not..."

"No...Lucas..." Mike whispered. Will looked at him, his fading form, then held out his hand.

"I cast...full heal..." Will said, touching Lucas. He didn't expect it to work. Without the Lich in the game, there wasn't supposed to be magic. But he had to try. There was a long pause, then Steve looked up at Will and shook his head.

"I don't think that your wizard can..." Steve was interrupted by the sound of Lucas drawing in breath, then his eyes burst open.

"Lucas!" Mike said rushing to him.

"Lucas...Thank goodness..." Steve said, sighing. Lucas smiled at him, and raised his eyebrows.

"I almost died. But...I didn't. And now I can still spend your money..." the concern on Steve's face turned to annoyance, then he dropped the boys' head and stood.

"Lucas is fine..."

"But Will..." Mike asked, looking at him, "That was...magic. Are you...?"

"I..." Will paused, then shook his head, "The Lich is gone, for now. That's all I know. I don't know what powers I gained, but...he won't bother us...not for a while..."

"Let's hope you're right..." Nancy said, "Now, you three clean up in here, we're going to bed!" Nancy grabbed Jonathan and Steve's hands and pulled them away, leaving Will, Lucas, and Mike in the room.

"I know, I could have been killed, and Dungeons and Dragons shouldn't have real world consequences..." Lucas started, "But that was pretty cool..."

"Yeah...it was..." Mike said, smiling at Will, and putting his hand out, "And you saved the day, Will...you're the hero..." Will felt his heart flutter again, then hugged Mike, as tight as he could.

"Thank you..."

Little bit of Mill(MikeXWill) for you. But we're really headed to "Cabin in the Woods" in the next chapter, so hang on.

5. Chapter 5

Chapter 5: Satellite Facility 124

So, here we go, Chapter 5's inspiration is really drawn from to Cabin in the Woods. I don't own either Stranger Things or Cabin in the Woods.

Hope you enjoy!

"Alright ladies, you ready?" Mr. Wheeler said, holding out a gentle hand to Mom as she stepped on to the boat, then picked Holly up and put her on. Finally, he looked up at his wife, and held out a hand, but Mrs. Wheeler stepped gracefully onto the boat without his help. Will, Mike and Lucas were meanwhile waiting to get on, wearing their bluejackets and swim trunks.

"I can't believe you really wanted to get back on the boat that quick. Are you feeling okay after yesterday?" Mike asked. Lucas nodded and turned to the house, where Steve, Jonathan and Nancy were standing, watching them leave.

"Yeah...I'm fine. Will seemed to heal me completely...And I really don't want to hear anymore...raccoon fights..." Lucas said and touching his chest gently.

"Are you sure?"

"Yeah. I'm in better shape than they are..." Lucas said, looking the older teens wounds.

"Well, maybe now we can all finally relax..." Will said, looking down.

"Hey..." Mike said, suddenly excited, "Do you think you might have special powers now since we beat the monster? like El? That would be so cool, if you could..."

"Dammit, Mike, leave him alone!" Nancy grunted from behind. Mike looked back at her with a scowl.

"I wasn't talking to you," Mike spat back. Nancy touched her neck wound and sighed.

"Yeah, but we could hear it. You might think about keeping it down..." Steve said, narrowing his black eye and frowning his busted lip. He signaled toward the mothers with a nod of his head that flicked his perfect hair. Will understood the meaning, and put a finger to Mike's mouth.

"Huh, it's funny that you three would tell *us* to be quiet..." Lucas said, "Be sure to watch carefully for racoons while we're gone..." All three of the older kids turned red and looked horribly uncomfortable, and Mike laughed at them loudly. Will, however, felt terrible that he was making Jonathan feel this way. Jonathan had never been anything but protective and kind to Will. He had taken care of him and loved him as an older brother, heck, like a father, and had been his best friend through most of his life. And probably still was. And here, at this cabin, Will was letting Mike and Lucas mock him, take his money, and bully him around, all over some stupid drinks. Will swallowed, then turned back to his brother.

"Jonathan...can you come here..." Will said, waving his friends to get on the boat. Jonathan took a few deep breaths, looked at Steve and Nancy, then moved over to where Will was.

"Yeah, buddy?" Jonathan asked, gently rubbing his bad hand.

"Jonathan...I'm sorry..."

"For what?" Jonathan said, squatting down to be on Will's level.

"For being...a jerk. We shouldn't be doing this to you...over..." Will leaned in to Jonathan's ear and whispered, "Drinking..."

"Drinking..." Jonathan whispered, his eyes growing wide, "I...well...Will..."

"I'll give you your money back. And I'll tell them to stop making fun of you. I'm sorry..."

"Don't worry about it buddy. I know you're not being mean, just trying to have fun. Thank you though..." Jonathan said, smiling

slightly, then hugged his brother, gave him a kiss on the forehead and patted his back with his good hand, "Now, go have fun...and tell me all about it when you get back..."

"Jonathan, get a photo!" Mom called, from the boat. She was holding a glass of some white, smoothie like drink, but based on the way Mrs. Wheeler was sipping hers, it didn't seem like a normal smoothie.

"Okay Mom!" Jonathan called, going back and grabbing his camera from Nancy as Will got onto the boat. Will sat on the back seats of the vessel, with Lucas, Mike and Holly, and waved to Jonathan. He could see Mrs. Wheeler, Mr. Wheeler, and Mom sitting in the front, doing the same.

"Have fun!" Jonathan called. He seemed weirdly happy now. Much happier. And Nancy and Steve didn't seem to be sharing his excitement. Will watched the three as the boat pulled away and the home faded from view.

"What did you tell Jonathan?" Mike asked. Will frowned, then looked at his friend.

"Mike...You need to be nicer to Nancy."

"What? Will..."

"Mike, Jonathan really likes Nancy. And Jonathan...he's...my brother..." Will sighed, "They don't deserve us being mean to them... Steve either..." Will looked at Lucas, "They've been there for us, rescued us, and defeated monsters and saved our lives more than once. Those three just did it again last night..."

"Will, I almost died too..." Lucas said.

"Yeah, and Steve grabbed and tried to help you immediately..." Will said. Lucas gave him a frown, while Mike sighed and crossed his arms.

"But Nancy she...well..." Mike trailed off, then Will took his hand.

"You don't have to agree with her, or do whatever she says. Even I don't do that with Jonathan. But you shouldn't be mean...to any of

them. Either of you. And we should give their money back..."

"You got seventy bucks to give away?" Lucas asked, giving him an incredulous look. Will shook his head.

"No. But you do. You didn't spend any of Steve's money. Because you knew it was wrong, just like I do..." Will said, crossing his arms. Lucas eyed him a few moments, then sighed.

"Fine Will. Fine. I'll give the money back. But Will, let me just tell you....maybe...maybe there is more to those three than you think..."

"What do you mean?" Will asked. Lucas eyed him for a long moment, shook his head.

"Never mind..." Lucas looked at Will, then at Holly, who was sitting between Lucas and Mike, sneering, "What you lookin' so grumpy about, Holly?"

"No new toys on the boat..." Holly said, crossing her arms, "Not fair..."

"Yeah, well...turns out life's not fair..." Lucas muttered, glancing at Will, then looking out at the shimmering blue lake water sliding past them.

Steve looked up through the openings in the trees above him and felt the warmth of the summer sun on his wounded face. He continued with long strides, walking alongside Nancy and Jonathan.

"We'll have the grotto all to ourselves today..." Jonathan said, smiling. Nancy looked him over, then turned to Steve.

"Just to be totally sure we don't have any more...unexpected viewers..." Nancy said, leaning forward and taking Steve's hand. Steve looked back at her, then heard the sound of a camera shutter. Jonathan had his camera out and was about to take another.

"Here Jonathan...a real good photo for you..." Steve grabbed Nancy and locked lips with her, lightly at first, then more hungrily. She first responded with shock, then was kissing him just as hard. Steve felt

his hands slip around Nancy's back, while her hands traced around his upper back. Eventually, Steve let her go, then looked back to Jonathan, who lowered his camera and swallowed hard, but smiled through it. *I like the way he does that*, Steve thought.

"St...Steve. Can I...?" Jonathan said, holding out a hand. Steve smiled at him. *So awkward, even with this...*

"You want a turn?" Steve asked, then, before Jonathan could respond Steve had grasped him by the waist and lower back. Steve planted a long kiss on Jonathan's lips and pulled him in closer as Jonathan's fingers slid through his hair and along his neck. In truth, Jonathan and Nancy kissed with about the same aggressiveness, and Steve couldn't always perfectly tell the difference between their soft, sweet lips. That is, other than Jonathan's whiskers over his lip, and Nancy's flavored lipstick.

"Alright, you two, cool it. We're not off the trail yet..." Nancy said, stepping over and putting a hand between them.

"Damn Jonathan..." Steve murmured as they pulled apart, "You seem...different..." Jonathan was really holding Steve tight, and that was probably the first time he'd ever asked for a kiss from anyone. Ever.

"He does seem...bolder to me..." Nancy offered. Jonathan gave a small smile.

"Well...You saw me talking to Will...before he left..."

"Yeah?"

"Lucas' secret that he told...it was that we were drinking. That's it!" Jonathan said excitedly. Steve felt his own mouth drop open, and froze up as he stared at Jonathan.

"Are you serious?" Nancy demanded, looking from Steve to Jonathan. Jonathan nodded, though his smile was fading.

"Yeah, that's what Will told me, and I can tell when he lies..."

"How can that be? Lucas..." Steve started.

"Either Lucas didn't hear or see us or he didn't tell Mike and Will..." Jonathan surmised.

"And Lucas...if Lucas really knew, he would have told them..." Nancy said, assuredly. Steve thought about the boy for a moment, his bold way of speaking, his witty, light tone and quick-thinking, but genuine nature. Mike, Will and Dustin, his friends were everything to him, Steve agreed. But something of that magnitude...about his friends' siblings...would Lucas even know what to say to Mike or Will?

"If Lucas wouldn't tell if he knew, then that means he doesn't know or understand..." Nancy continued, then looked at Jonathan, now smiling just as widely, "We weren't caught...our lives...might not be ruined..." Steve hoped in his heart she was right, then grabbed Jonathan by the waist and pulled him close.

"You know...I was kinda getting excited to be able to kiss you whenever I wanted..." Steve said, giving Jonathan another peck on the lips. He felt Jonathan's hands trace along his shoulders, but Nancy stopped them by grabbing their hands.

"Nope, Steve...we're a secret again, which means you have to come this way..." Nancy said, pushing the two apart gently and pointing toward a bit of thicket, "We can have all the fun we want, in our secret hideaway..." Nancy took one of the boys' hands each, then pulled them out, through a bit of brush, and ended up standing before the grotto.

"All to us, huh?"

"It should be..."

"But, isn't this on the trail map?" Jonathan asked. Nancy opened a map to show him.

"This grotto used to be. But actually, the current maps say to avoid this area because of steep and hazardous rocks. That's why Mike was getting so lost last time. No one who doesn't already know about this should be able to find us..."

"Steep and hazardous rocks?" Jonathan asked, looking around the

grotto. Steve decided that, on that day, nothing strange would happen, and threw down his bag next to the pool.

"I don't care. It's not dangerous, and it's good enough for me..." Steve said, starting to undo his socks and shoes. Steve saw Jonathan and Nancy following suit.

"I agree...here, you got your bathing suit?" Nancy asked, opening her bag. Steve eyed her, then took off his shirt.

"Bathing suit?" Steve said, pretending to be confused.

"Yeah, you know, swim trunks, for..." Jonathan started, put Steve put up a hand.

"We're alone in a secret hideaway. And I'm with you two. I don't need a bathing suit here..." Steve undid his belt, then let everything, pants and boxers, fall to the ground.

"Steve..." Nancy muttered, pinching her forehead.

"What, you like what you see?" Steve asked slipping into the water and turning around to face the two.

"No... it's not that, it's..." Nancy tried.

"Yes..." Jonathan butt in, starting to undo his own pants.

"That's the spirit, Byers!" Steve said. Jonathan let his pants drop, then, trying to work his wounded hand, very slowly pulled his briefs down. He stepped into the water carefully, but Steve rushed Jonathan, grabbed him by the waist, and pulled the boy down on top of him. They were intertwined as they surfaced, and soon Jonathan had his arms and legs wrapped around Steve as they gently moved around the pool.

"Hey, Nancy. Are you coming?" Steve asked. Nancy stared at them, then rolled her eyes.

"This is bullsh*t Steve..." Nancy muttered, though she said it with a smile. Steve glanced at her, then looked at nude Jonathan hanging on to him.

"What part, Nance? Me, him, you, some combination or being naked?" Steve asked, bouncing eyebrows at Jonathan.

"...being naked..." Nancy muttered, undoing her bra, then undoing her jeans. By the time she finally got her panties off, Steve had Jonathan up against one of the stone sides of the grotto's pool and was thrusting his tongue into the boy's mouth.

"Jez Steve, Jonathan...get a room..." Nancy said, sliding into the water and starting to trace along Steve's shoulder.

"We have one...you're invited..." Steve offered, looking her over. The cut at the base of her neck was bad, and Steve wanted to make it better, but he didn't suspect kissing it would work that well.

"We're a secret again, we have to be more careful..." Nancy said, then leaned her head on Steve's back. He let her stay there a moment, then Jonathan leaned around him and started to rub Nancy with his good hand.

"Jonathan...Steve..." Nancy started, softly, "Can we do this? Does this even make sense?"

"Do you not like it?" Jonathan asked.

"I love it...I love you both, and now...now you at least like each other too...and that makes me happier than you could know...But, is something wrong with us? We are three people, two boys..." Nancy let go of Steve and leaned on the grotto pool wall next to Jonathan, "Are we...monsters? Or something weird or strange or...?" Nancy trailed off and Steve eyed her.

"Nancy...strange things don't stop happening to us..." Steve said, "You and Jonathan first did the nasty in that crazy reporter's house, right? The one who was investigating into the now closed Hawkins lab where they created telepathic children and summoned monsters from another dimension?" Steve said, sliding toward Nancy, "And the first time we did it...your friend Barb..."

"Was kidnapped..." Nancy said, breathing deeply, "And killed..." Nancy closed her eyes, and waited a few seconds, then opened them

again, "And the first time Jonathan did you..."

"We fought an undead horror, a real one, in a game of Dungeons and Dragons..." Jonathan muttered, "I guess we're doomed to weirdness..."

"Right, so, three people, dating each other, in a loving relationship, that's pretty tame compared to most the crazy we face..." Steve leaned forward.

"Besides..." Jonathan started, "There are lots of stories of both animals and humans having more than one lover. Wolf and lion males both keep more than one female lover around them. Bees and elephant females keep males around them. And herds, like sheep or goats or zebra...well, they do whoever they want, whenever they want. It's like those places without marriage..."

"The Free-love societies?" Nancy asked, raising an eyebrow.

"Right...those..." Jonathan said, "But...I...kinda want to be just with you two."

"Date two people exclusively?" Steve said, raising an eyebrow.

"Sounds like a harem...my harem..." Nancy said, pushing Jonathan into Steve and leaning on the wall, "My boys...I could get used to that..."

"I suppose I could too..." Steve muttered, looking Jonathan over, then turning to Nancy, "But, I'm an only child in a rich family...You've got to teach me how to share though..." Steve slid over to Nancy and started to kiss her, hungrily and hard. She leaned back, let him kiss her for a while, then pushed him aside, and signaled to Jonathan.

"You better come here if you want any of it..."

"I have a brother...and a father who didn't like me. I can be patient..."

"I have parents who are too boring to enforce rules and a horribly spoiled little brother...and you know what's crazy? Holly is worse than Mike ever was!" Nancy muttered, then pulled both Jonathan and

Steve to her, "Turns out...I'm not very good at sharing either..." Nancy kissed Steve, then Jonathan, then Steve, then Jonathan again. They were getting closer, touching each other and reaching for each other's sexes when Steve heard a slight purring. He had his eyes closed, kissing up and down Nancy's neck, then slipped over and started kissing Jonathan up and down his side, when the purring became more of an *EEK*. Steve looked up from Jonathan and turned slowly to see it, a ball of grey fur, sitting next to his bag. Steve watched it for a few moments, then the racoon turned around, looked at Steve, and cocked its head slightly.

"Is that...the racoon!" Steve muttered, pushing away from Jonathan and Nancy and moving for Nancy's bag, where she had packed both a pistol and the hunting rifle.

"Wait! Steve!" Jonathan's hands slipped around Steve's chest and started to pull him back.

"No Jonathan! It's the same racoon! I can see it! And I can sense it!" Steve roared. And he could. He felt like he was facing down an old enemy. An old enemy who had taken a bag of peanuts out of Steve's backpack. The creature started eating Steve's midday snack as Jonathan continued to pull him back.

"Stop Steve! Don't hurt him! He didn't do anything to us on purpose!" Jonathan said, pulling Steve back down onto him. Steve was back in the pool, with Jonathan's arms around his chest and his rear end pressed onto Jonathan's crotch. *This is exactly what you want...isn't it Byers?* Steve thought.

"What are you doing? Why are you trying to protect this racoon, Byers?" Steve asked. Jonathan held Steve a moment more, then let him go and sighed.

"I'm protecting that racoon, Steve, because...killing animals...bothers me..." Jonathan said, swallowing hard, "When I was younger, 10 maybe, my father made me go hunting with him, and he made me kill a rabbit in front of him...he thought it'd make me stronger, a better son, and not a...a..."

"Queer?" Steve finished, "Yeah, well, that part didn't work out, so..."

"But Steve, I cried for a week after. Because I killed this creature, took its life, to meet my dad's messed up expectations of me. That... hurt me, and that's why killing animals, especially animals that don't threaten anyone, bothers me...even when I was going to mercy kill a deer with Nancy...I cried that night over it..." Steve looked at Nancy, who was on the verge of tears, then at Jonathan again.

"The same day I saw you and Nancy together...that night..."

"Yeah..."

"Then you kicked my ass the next day...and made me see how attractive you are..." Steve leaned forward slowly, and kissed the boy gently on his nose.

"That story is real cute...and so are you..." Steve said, putting a hand on Jonathan's cheek and smiling thinly, "I'm still killing that motherf*****," Steve pushed off from Jonathan and jumped from the pool. As he rushed for Nancy's bag, the racoon jumped from its place and rushed up the side of the grotto. Steve reached in her bag, pulled out the pistol, and took aim at the creature, now nearly at the top of the grotto.

"Steve, no!" Jonathan rushed the boy and knocked the gun from his hand. Jonathan grabbed Steve's wrist with his good hand and interlocked fingers with his bad.

"Dammit, Byers, don't you know well enough when to quit?"

"No...Steve, I'm not going to..." Jonathan started, when the racoon purred loudly from its perch up on the grotto, near the waterfall. Both boys looked up to see the racoon purr again, cock its head, then lean its hand over and started touching some metal box.

"Hey, there isn't food in that!" Steve called, "It's some special access thing. And it has a big DOE sign on it..." Nancy glanced at him, then at the box, then back at Steve.

"Wait, DOE? Like, Department of Energy? How do you know?" Nancy asked.

"I went up there with Lucas, when the boys were with us back on

Tuesday...why are you looking like that? is it...?" Steve trailed off and his eyes grew wide in understanding, "The Department of Energy...like in Hawkins..." the racoon *eeeked* loudly from the box it stood over, then two bright yellow lights lit up to either side the grotto.

"What's going on?" Jonathan asked, then there was the sound of something big moving, and the sound of water draining.

"Nancy!" Steve yelled, rushing to where Nancy was, still in the water. Jonathan was right behind him, and the two of them hauled her out just as the floor of the grotto pool shifted, and the water started poured away. The waterfall over the grotto was closed by the appearance of a small metal door, while the grotto pool floor had become the steps of a large, soaked staircase, which led down into what was pitch black under the grotto wall.

"What the f***?" Jonathan questioned, trying to take in what was happening in front of him.

"I couldn't have said it better myself, Byers..." Steve muttered. The fact that the three of them were naked made this even wilder, and the racoon, now making a cooing noise, slid down to the stairs and waved at the three. As if asking them to follow it.

"A racoon is trying to get us to follow him into a deep, dark hole in an area marked by the Department of Energy..." Jonathan murmured, then looked at Nancy and Steve, "Even stranger things are happening to us now..."

"That seems to be the name of the game with us...only this time, we're out at a cabin in the woods..." Nancy muttered.

Steve had taken the lead position of their group, all the better to knock out or kill the racoon, and so was in front of Jonathan and Nancy as he went down the stairs. He had put his clothes back on, and though he'd left most of his half-eaten snacks in his bag, he was wielding his nail bat and had a lighter and small knife just in case. Nancy had the hunting rifle, along with her own knife while Jonathan had their groups' radio and was illuminating the stairs with

an emergency flashlight. He also a pistol on his hip, though Steve suspected it was more for backing up Nancy than for him to use.

"Let me just say, one more time...I think it's a bad idea to follow the rodent into the deep dark tunnel..." Steve said. Jonathan cleared his throat behind him.

"That's not just any normal racoon, he opened the emergency door, and he's trying to communicate with you Steve..."

"We know what you think Byers. And we're following it. Turn that light forward, I can't hardly see anything..." Steve muttered. There was the sound of some metal or things shifting above them, and Steve gripped his bat tighter.

"Dammit, what was that?"

"I don't know...but keep that bat close..."

"I will, if that racoon gets in range, I'm gonna give it a good hard whack with this, and we'll see who's purring..." Steve muttered. The racoon that was leading them, turned around suddenly, and looked, rather desperately sadly at Steve. At least, that was how it appeared in the thin light of Jonathan's flashlight.

"Alright, I didn't mean it..." Steve muttered, pointing forward with the bat, "I won't hit you. Just, show us whatever it is..." the racoon purred, happier, then continued. The stairs, while horribly dark and hard to see, were actually not that long, and soon enough, the racoon was plodding along a flat, rubber grey flooring that made Steve feel like he was back in chemistry lab. A lab he'd failed multiple times.

"What is this place..." Jonathan asked as they walked slowly through the hallway, looking around.

"Another lab...another..." Nancy paused. Steve looked back to see Nancy touching the wall. There was a small phrase printed on the wall, which Jonathan illuminated.

"DOE Satellite Facility 124, Monroe County, Indiana," Jonathan read slowly.

"No..." Nancy murmured, looking down, "Jonathan we..."

"We brought down one..." Jonathan said, "We can bring down another..."

"I hope you're right..." Steve said, twirling his bat. The three of them turned as the racoon purred from down the hall. They moved toward the noise, turning left at a fork to find nothing. Just the dark, seemly abandoned facility with nothing but emergency lights on. There was a large, open staircase that went up several floors, but down only one to a large chamber. Directly in front of them, beyond the staircase was a large wall that looked to Steve like large metal boxes stacked on top of each other. To the right, he saw something that looked like a small sports arena, while to his left...

"Is that?" Nancy asked, straining to see.

"It looked like blood. A lot of dried blood..." Steve muttered, putting a hand out for his allies to stop. The racoon cooed, probably in agreement, then started down the stairs. Steve looked back to Nancy and Jonathan for support. Both nodded at him, then he sighed, twirled his bat and started down the staircase. At the bottom, he could see just how high those metal boxes looked stacked, along with how much dried blood there seemed to be to his left. Steve swallowed as he very gently walked over the old red stains.

"This is so gross..." Steve muttered.

"What happened? Who were all these people killed?" Jonathan asked.

"And why did they all seem to die here?" Nancy wondered. Steve looked down around him, then out, at the sports like arena. As he got closer, he could see that it seated maybe fifty total, but it looked down on an enormous round space. Inside was what looked to be a mix of sand and dirt, and on both sides of the space were metal doors. Steve, along with Jonathan and Nancy, stared out into the arena for a few long moments before the racoon made another loud purr. They turned to see the racoon sitting on to the top of a large, metallic device that to Steve looked like an arcade machine.

"What is this place?" Steve asked the creature. It cocked its head, then

looked down at the machine below it. The three teenagers moved to the machine, then Jonathan held out a hand slowly to the keyboard of the device.

"Byers wait..." Steve said, but the racoon cooed in support.

"This is what we're supposed to see, Steve..." Jonathan touched the keyboard gently, then noticed a round black ball to the side of the keyboard.

"What..." Jonathan reached out his good hand and slid his fingers along the ball. There was a loud beep, then the screen lit up. "*Human, Verified, Normal Access Granted*" appeared in block green letters, then, information began to overwhelm the screen in front of them. Steve understood almost none of the green words and symbols, and instead turned to metallic boxes behind him.

"What are these..." Steve asked, walking slowly to the closest doors and touching it gently. Then, there was a loud rumble, and something shook the box next to him. Steve's heart jumped into his throat and he started to back up in terror as the box continued to shake. Soon, more of the boxes were shaking and Steve backed into Jonathan.

"Wha...what..." Steve asked, putting an arm around Jonathan's. Nancy held up her hunting rifle and stood next to Steve.

"Something is in those boxes...some creature, or monster, or inhuman..."

"Like a Lich..."

"Or an intelligent racoon..." Steve said, looking up at the creature. It cocked its head, then jumped down onto the keyboard. It pressed a few keys, and Steve saw it illuminated a line that said "*Open Shutters – All*" then jumped off and disappeared down a nearby hallway.

"Wha...hey! Where are you..." there was the sound of loud hydraulic sounds, then Steve, Nancy and Jonathan all turned in horror as they saw the doors on the boxes open slowly.

"Oh...sh*t..." Steve said, holding up his bat. He started to back into the nearest wall as the door opened and a number of sounds, roars,

groans, cries, squeaks, even a loud creaking noise came from the boxes. The sounds grew louder, and then...that was it. The sounds continued, but nothing came out of the open doors of the boxes.

"What's going on?"

"Is it a trap? Or some trick?" Jonathan asked. Nancy seemed to think a moment, then shook her head.

"No, its...well...shutters aren't usually doors, per se. They usually are outside covers to...to..." Nancy started.

"Windows...the racoon wanted us to see into the boxes," Jonathan finished.

"Where did that thing go?" Steve asked, looking around. Nancy, grabbed Steve's shoulder and pointed.

"Steve...I think we should go look at these boxes..."

"And here's to hoping the windows hold..." Jonathan muttered, drawing the pistol, then moving slowly toward the closest box. Steve followed with Nancy, and as they came slowly to the nearest open shutter, they found, the box empty. Steve leaned in toward the window, trying to looking around the whole thing and advancing slowly and carefully, when suddenly a giant Hercules Beetle smashed into the window and shook the box with a loud clicking noise. The three teenagers tripped over themselves and fell to the ground, but Steve could see that while the beetle was flapping against the window, but it couldn't do anything but hover around its green and blue lit box. Steve stared at it for a few moments, before letting his eyes slip to the next box, which had some sort of gigantic bird, something that looked like an eagle in it. The creatures eyes were crystal blue however, and when it opened its mouth to caw, it instead had a beak within its beak that snapped at the three.

"What are these?"

"Monsters?" Jonathan said, looking up. The boxes' outer side were all windows now, and Steve could see Jonathan was right. There was all manner of creature around them, real and mythical. Steve first

noticed that the box over the beetle's had some small, shimmering creature buzzing around its window.

"Is some bug too?"

"No...I think it's...a fairy..." Nancy said, then looked over and her eyes grew huge, "And that's a unicorn..." Steve turned to see a large white horse with a long, spiked horn kicking at the window in front of it. Above that, Steve could see a large cobra circling its box, while a large kraken like monster was squeezed in one filled with water next to it. Steve saw two more aquatic ones, one with a sleek, metallic shark that had what looked like spinning buzz saws in its mouth, and another with a blue, half-human, half-frog monster in it. Steve could see things that looked like mutants, giants, amalgamations of animals, and human like creatures, including one on the bottom level with what looked to be a pale faced human in a long black cloak with several saw blades sticking out various parts of him. Next to him, two creatures half the height of a human, one of bright green skin, one of bright red, were muttering to each other in some language Steve didn't know. When they turned to the three, Steve could see their yellow pointed teeth, small, black eyes and the long, wild white hair coming from their scalps.

"What are these?" Steve asked, trying to see and consider more of the creatures. It was only then that Steve noticed several of the boxes were empty.

"Steve...they aren't just monsters..." Nancy said, pointing to the beetle's box, where a phrase was written, *"Dimensional Creature 34,"* "They're monsters from...from..."

"Other dimensions..." Neither Steve, nor Nancy, nor Jonathan said this, and they turned around, and saw four men. Humans. Two were in full black body armor, and had large, automatic weapons pointed at the three teenagers. One was a man in a tight black suit with his hands in his pockets. And the last one was in a long white coat over his suit.

"We should have suspected as much..." the man in the suit said, sighing and looking up at the various creatures in their boxes, "As soon as we saw that Byers and Wheelers from Hawkins were coming

in to Monroe County, we should have alerted Dr. Brenner...drop your weapons..."

"Dr. Brenner..." Jonathan said, looking at Nancy, then back at the men before them, "Dr. Brenner is dead..."

"Of course he is...my mistake..." the man in a suit said, "Drop your weapons..." Steve hesitated, holding up his bat, but Jonathan and Nancy put their guns on the ground slowly, then looked at the man before them.

"Mr. Harrington. Please..." the man muttered. The two, armed men took a step toward the teenagers. Steve breathed deeply a few times, then threw the bat down. The man in the suit smiled, then scratched at his temple.

"Well, this is awkward. Allow us to introduce ourselves, Mr. Byers, Mr. Harrington, and Ms. Wheeler. We know you because we, Dr. Hadley and I, worked at the Hawkins facility under Dr. Brenner's tenure, before we came here and opened the first of his satellite facilities. And he talked a lot about you three...the three teenagers of Hawkins who beat a fully grown Dimensional 2 Monster two, a pentispoke mouth..." the man trailed off, then turned to the man in the lab coat next to him, "This distinguished professor next to me is Dr. Hadley, a man of exceeding intelligence..." the scientist beside the man in the suit cleared his throat, and put his hands behind his back. He was a pudgy man, with a receding hairline, puffy cheeks and glasses so thick they magnified the man's eyes on his face.

"Mr. Sitterson, what exactly do you want me to say to them?"

"How about hello to start, doctor? And, as my colleague here noted, I am Mr. Sitterson...and these two men are Brad and Jacob..."

"My name is Chad sir..." one of the armored men said. Mr Sitterson nodded quickly.

"Yes, as I meant..." Mr. Sitterson said, then smiled slightly at the three. Nancy harrumphed and put her hands on her hips.

"What is this place? Why are there these...monsters here, and...what,

what..." Nancy tried, but could not stop looking up at the boxes.

"Ms. Wheeler, I'm sure this is disturbing, but I assure you..."

"This...you're..." Jonathan looked around, then it seemed like he connected the dots in his head and pointed, "You're taking these creatures, and having them fight, in an arena. You're testing them as weapons...how...how many gates to other dimensions have you opened?" Jonathan asked. Dr. Hadley cleared his throat, then pointed. Steve followed the angle of his index finger to the bat's box, which had the number 36 on the top.

"36? You've opened 36 gates?"

"Yes, and we've successfully closed all thirty-six too..." Dr. Hadley, said, taking his thick glasses off his face, then wiping them off with the side pocket of his jacket, "You see, it took some experimentation, but, the rift opening at Hawkins has made opening portals to other dimensions much easier than it should be. Consider the sandwich analogy we have come to love so much when talking about other dimension. If there are two parallel universe, and each one is a piece of bread, then what happened at Hawkins last fall was like a toothpick being stuck through the two pieces, pushed around in a circle, then being pulled out and the bread being separated. Even though the two pieces of bread are distinct again..."

"The bread still has a hole in it?" Steve asked cautiously. Dr. Hadley smiled and nodded.

"Yes, precisely. Now, Eventually, if we wait long enough, the hole should close up, making our universe very unlike bread in that regard. But, if you were to jam a toothpick from our bread into another piece, it would be easier and with less resistance. As the barriers between our universe and the Vale of Shadows weakened...it was easier to open new gates..." Dr. Hadley signaled to the boxes, then continued, "Using the technology and connections discovered through experimentation on Eleven and the other numbers, we have found a way to safely open and close these pathways at this facility, in a special zone we have created...something we're calling the interdimensional zone..." Dr. Hadley moved to the nearest box, where a human shaped thing that seemed a lot like a scarecrow was

touching the window gently, "As long as the gates and creatures are kept in the interdimensional zone, they are contained. When the zone is closed, these creatures will return home, back through the open holes and out into their parallel dimensions, whereas, if any of the creatures try to leave the zone on their own..." the doctor eyed the scarecrow a moment, then the creature moved to the back of its box and sat down. Steve could see that part of its arm was missing, "They find that the zone acts like a buffer and will throw them back, either violently or...in pieces..." the doctor moved slightly to get off a stain of blood, "We test the monsters against one another in the arena area, and narrow down which ones are both easily controlled and...are marketable..."

"Marketable?" Nancy asked. Steve looked around.

"Isn't this...is a DOE facility..."

"It was. But the Department of Energy, with all the heat from Hawkins, has shut down funding to all facilities within the state of Indiana..." Mr. Sitterson said, adjusting his suit-jacket, "Luckily for Dr. Brenner and Dr. Hadley here, there are other sources of funding available for enterprising minds like him..." the man cleared his throat, and Steve shook his head.

"You're from some company. Some big corporation..."

"Ding-ding..." Mr. Sitterson said, putting his hands in his pockets, "Dark-Sky Weapons Corporation, and this is now one of our primary R&D facilities..." the man moved to where the sawed, pale creature was standing, staring at him, "Just imagine, countries falling all over themselves to buy the latest monster. We sell France fairies, Britain krakens, Russia zombie bears...and America..." there was a low roar that Steve recognized and he looked up in horror to see a demigorgan, circling in a box two levels up, "America can buy the monsters they already know so well..." Jonathan grabbed Steve and pointed at the doctor.

"But...it's not perfect..." Jonathan said, swallowing, "One creature has broken out...right?" the doctor and the man in the suit looked at each other, then back at the boy.

"Dimensional Monster 14, the white terror..." Dr. Hadley said, clearing his throat, "It hasn't broken out..., not yet, and not truly..." the Dr. pointed up at a box, Steve, Jonathan and Nancy stepped back from the windows slowly until they could see it, the Lich. It was in a tattered green robe, and had white skin and bright white eyes. The creature was still in the box, but had its hand to the window.

"It has a very unique power..." the doctor said, "It can project itself, mental images onto certain mediums. That's why our computers are now locked to human use only..." Dr. Hadley said, "We lost a lot of good people when that creature started to take over our systems, and now we've got barely enough technicians and security officers to keep this facility's lights on...I would surmise that this creature left those wounds on you..."

"It also killed one of our most promising tools, a racoon like creature with incredible mental prowess," Mr. Sitterson said, "I'll miss that little rodent..."

"A smart racoon...was killed?" Steve asked, glancing around him, "Are you sure..."

"Enough...Dr. Hadley, I'm growing bored. We need to prepare a better list of talking points for you before our upcoming government presentation..." Mr. Sitterson drew a pistol and pointed it at Nancy, "I apologize to have taken up your time, Ms. Wheeler, but I must make sure this facility is not found out, not yet. And I definitely cannot have any more curious Byers or Wheelers poking around here..."

"You...you can't kill just us!" Nancy said, slipping back toward the arcade like machine. Steve was stepping back with her, holding out his hand. He bumped into the arcade like machine, and gripped it tightly as he looked down Mr. Sitterson's pistol.

"Our...our parents, and our siblings will look for us...your facility will be found...and you all will be...we have telepaths and...and..." Jonathan struggled, pointing with his bad hand.

"Officers of the law!" Nancy added.

"You are obviously referring to Eleven and the Hawkins sheriff that

now owns her. Do not fear, this zone severely limits telepathy as well...her powers would be near useless here, as will any attempt you make to stop us...besides, by the time your parents, little brothers, and the sheriff start their search for you, we will be ready for phase 4. And your precious cabin in the woods, like every other cabin on this miserable lake, will be part of our...experiment..."

"I...I..." Nancy stuttered, then looked at Steve, who glanced at Jonathan. The younger boy gulped and put up his hands.

"Please don't kill us...please...we won't do anything...we're just kids..." Jonathan began to blubber and look sad. Steve suspected it was a ruse and it didn't seem to be working with the man Steve started calling "Crazy Sitterson" in his head.

"I'm sorry, but I must make sure this facility remains a secret..." As Sitterson said this, Steve felt some being put into his hand. There was a loud roar, then the aquatic humanoid started banging against its glass. It was followed by the fairy, then the unicorn, then it seemed all the creatures and monsters started banging against the glass. Mr. Sitterson, Dr. Hadley and the two armed men turned their attention to the boxes, and started to back away. Steve watched them for a moment, then heard a purr, a quiet, subtle sound in his ear.

"What's happening doctor?"

"I don't know, it seems like the dimensional beings are trying to break out, now more intensely than ever..." Dr. Hadley muttered. Steve watched a moment more, then looked down slowly to see that he had a key in his hand. He turned slowly and saw a racoon on top of the arcade like device, cooing and rubbing its nose. Steve eyed it, then, the creature held up its hands and started to sign. *Sign*, as in make symbols that meant something in American Sign Language. Steve had to stare for a good twenty seconds before he recognized what was happening. The racoon was signing at him. And he could understand those signs. The racoon was very basic, however, mostly spelling out letters as opposed to saying words. Steve, soon enough though, recognized what the racoon was saying, the letters, "Y-O-U H-E-L-P M-E, I H-E-L-P Y-O-U..." Steve glanced back, between the concerned Mr. Sitterson, the reassuring Dr. Hadley, the terrified Nancy and the hopeless Jonathan, then turned to the racoon before them.

"Help me save my friends..." Steve said quietly. The racoon nodded, then Steve held up the key, "Alright, vermin, here you go!" Steve roared, plugging the metallic piece in his hand into a keyhole on the device. The creatures in the boxes began slamming even harder, roaring even louder, then Steve turned the key and the device lit up, with the words "FULL ACCESS GRANTED" lit up on it.

"Wait! What are you doing?" Dr. Hadley yelled. Steve looked behind him to see the doctor raising a pistol, but Steve knew he was too late.

"I have no clue..." Steve said, gazing back at the racoon, "I'm sorry Nancy...Jonathan..." Steve put his hand on the sphere on the side of the device as the racoon jumped onto the keyboard and pressed several buttons. The rodent cooed a few times, then pressed a release. There was a loud, long click, then the sound of something powering up as the boxes began to shake.

"No! No!" Dr. Hadley said, drawing back from the boxes. Mr. Sitterson was out of Steve's sight, and the two armed men had their guns oscillating between Steve and the creatures in the boxes. There was a "Ding" sound, then Brad, or Chad or whatever his name was cocked his gun.

"Sh*t..." he muttered, then it was chaos as animals, humanoids and monsters burst from their cells. Some creatures ran or rushed for the doors, some went for the three men. Steve, Jonathan and Nancy watched in horror as the creatures began to attack and tear the men apart. Then, the small shimmering light of the fairy burst from its cell and rushed for Nancy's hand. It seized her finger and soon was dragging her past the monsters into an adjacent hallway, Nancy screaming all the way.

"Nancy!" Johnathan yelled, rushing after the girl. As he took his fifth step, a long, wriggling tentacle thrust out from a box and wrapped around his leg. Jonathan fell, then was pulled back toward the Kraken, which roared threateningly.

"Byers!" Steve yelled, snatching up his bat and giving the tentacle a hard whack with it. The Kraken roared, then, it's tentacle was punched by a webbed blue hand, and bit by thin, sharp teeth. The tentacle released Jonathan and he stood up, only to have his foot

grabbed by the aquatic human like thing and pulled down another hallway, the opposite way from Nancy.

"Jonathan, Nancy! No!" Steve yelled, holding up his bat and trying to decide which way to follow. Then he felt the racoon clamber onto his shoulder, and the creature signed out "FRIENDS," right next to him in a way that felt like it was yelling.

"Yes, you dumb rodent, they are my friends...and I need them back! But the fairy and water thing..." Steve started, but the racoon shook its head in the negative, then pulled on Steve's jacket, curled one hand up and moved it back and forth like some kind of bug, then put its hands on its neck, flapped his fingers, then signed "FRIENDS" again. Steve stared a moment, trying to understand the game of charades the racoon was playing, then, just as he heard the sounds of the Dr. Hadley screaming in his ear, he got it. Or at least he hoped he did.

"The fairy and water thing. they're your friends...and...we're all friends..." Steve offered. The racoon nodded vigorously, then pointed toward the staircase.

"We're going after them...fine!" Steve said, knocking another tentacle out of his way, "This is how I die...fighting monsters and strange evil creatures trying to reach Nancy and Jonathan...I'm not surprised..." Just as he started up the stairs, he heard a loud creak, then what looked to be an enormous, fast moving tree branch thrust out and skewered one of the armed men. The branch stretched through him and continued toward Steve, who bolted away, up the stairs one, two, three floors, the cooing racoon hanging on as he ran. Eventually he got to the top, ran down an adjacent hallway, then another, until he tripped over a duck with four legs and a long, sharp beak. It was leading a small set of ducklings and they all started to caw angrily. The lead duck opened his beak, and a second, even scarier beak burst forth from it.

"Jesus!" Steve said, giving the lead duck a whack with his bat and sending it flying, "Sorry! But watch where your going!" Steve yelled. He rushed around the scary ducklings and tried to watch to make sure none were following him before he smacked headlong into two double doors and fell down, face first, into a hard metallic floor.

"Ow..." Steve muttered, sitting up slowly. Then, he heard the sound of screams, then Nancy crashed headlong into the back of Steve.

"Nancy!" Steve said, turning toward the girl of his dreams. *She's back and she's safe!* Steve thought as he grabbed her and hugged her tightly.

"Steve, thank God...I..." there was the sound of another loud scream, a male, lower scream, then Jonathan crashed into both of the teenagers.

"Ow!" Jonathan grunted, as he lifted from his place between Nancy and Steve.

"Jonathan!" Steve and Nancy said together, grabbing him and kissing him on both cheeks. Jonathan began to blush, then he was grabbed by the collar and pulled to his feet by the aqua creature. Nancy was pulled to her feet by the fairy, which then moved to the door and started to buzz back and forth out of the lock, closing it tightly behind them. The racoon hopped onto Steve's chest, and started rubbing its snout as Steve began to sit up and look at it.

"Alright, rodent...you got us out of there, and we freed you're... friends," Steve signaled to the fairy and the water creature, "Now what?" the racoon purred once, then slipped off Steve and moved toward the double doors beside them. Steve eyed it, then stood up and pushed them open. In front of him was a small, dark room, which looked to Steve most like a recording studio. There were three huge screens and two more arcade like devices, and a board of buttons, lights and keys that started to make Steve's head hurt. Two of the monitors were spitting out green word, while the third showed rotating map. Underneath each of the three monitors was a mess of keyboards, smaller screens, switches and levers.

"What is this place?" Steve asked, looking over the screens.

"I don't know..." Nancy murmured, following Steve, "But I have a bad feeling about this..."

"Me too..." Jonathan muttered, then two men in tight white shirts and thin dark ties stood and put their hands up.

"Please don't hurt us..."

"Get out!" Nancy yelled. The fairy next to her buzzed in anger, then Jonathan pointed too.

"Leave! Or else!" the men nodded and took off running, leaving the room to the three teenagers and their new "friends."

"So, what now?"

"We...we should help them..." Jonathan said, looking at the aquatic creature tapping its webbed fingers together next to him, "These three...they bear us no ill will. They want to go home...that's all..."

"How do you know?" Nancy asked, looking at the fairy buzzing next to the racoon, and then back to Jonathan.

"Because...this thing...is putting images into my head..." Jonathan muttered, looking at the aquatic thing, "I don't totally understand it, but I think it...communicates that way...and it's trying to show me...that it wants to..."

"Go back. That's what they all want..." Nancy said, looking at the fairy, "She was trying to buzz out words. I understand it now. Go home. Go home..."

"And how do we send them all home?" Steve asked, looking at the screen. Jonathan closed his eyes, looking almost pained, then opened them.

"Close the zone. Turn off the interdimensional zone...and this torment ends..." Jonathan said.

"And we can do it from here?" Nancy asked. The fairy buzzed out a ~YES~. Steve turned to the racoon, which cocked its head, then started signing.

"M-A-I-N-F-R-A-M-E." Steve read off from the racoon, then the creature made a sign Steve didn't recognize but he would have guessed meant either type or use computer.

"We can use the mainframe to shut down the zone..." the racoon

nodded, then moved toward the machine and went to one side and started typing then signaled to a sphere on one side of the machine. Steve moved quickly and put his hand on it, which brought up the text giving the racoon access. The racoon started to type, then looked up at the screen and signaled to the other monitors, pointing with its nose and one hand. Steve tried to follow it, but instead the fairy went to the racoon, buzzed a few times to the animal, then moved to Nancy and started tugging on her arm gently.

"What...you need me..." Nancy said, then followed the fairy to the other side of the screen. Nancy put her hand on a nearby sphere, then saw the fairy buzzing over one key.

"You...need me to help, don't you..." Nancy said. The fairy buzzed in the affirmative, then it moved to a key and waited. Nancy pressed it, then it moved to a different key. Nancy typed that one, then started to follow, pressing keys as the fairy hovered over them.

"I...I have to help too..." Jonathan said, closing his eyes again. The aqua creature made something between a seal bark and a yelp, and then Jonathan moved to the third screen and touched the sphere there. The aquatic creature moved to where Jonathan stood and held out a small piece of metal.

"Another key..." Steve said, as the racoon near him typed out a sequence on his keyboard, Nancy typed out another on her keyboard following the fairy's instructions, and Jonathan activated a system by putting his key into a small slot over the sphere in front of him. The racoon purred as it pressed two more buttons, then the room grew dark and lights over the screen began to blink and flash loudly.

"This is it...we're shutting it down!"

"They can go home, and this...craziness can be over..."

"I love you two..." Jonathan said, looking back and forth. Steve and Nancy looked at each other, then at Jonathan.

"Is this the time..." Steve started.

"I love you two too!" Nancy said, looked at Jonathan, then at Steve,

and biting her lip, "I've loved both of you, for a long time...and I didn't know how to handle it, or what to do...and...and...I'm sorry...I just hope...I haven't hurt you both too much for..."

"Oh my god, fine! I love you Nancy! And I probably love you too Byers! Now, Nancy, finish the sequence!" Steve yelled. Nancy glanced down to where the fairy was waiting impatient, and finished typing. There was a loud beep. Then the screens went dark for a moment. In fact, everything seemed to go dark to Steve, and it seemed like nothing was left.

"Uh...Nancy...Jonathan..."

"I'm here..."

"I'm here too, but I can still sense the aquatic things thoughts," Jonathan said. The fairy suddenly illuminated herself like a bright porchlight and moved to the racoon, which purred from its place in front of Steve and began to point at the keys in front of it and make noises Steve might have guessed would have been vulgar. Then, there was a loud rumbling, and the middle monitor, the one Jonathan was standing before, came back on. It illuminated a map of Lake Monroe and the layout of the facility. Around the north half of the facility a bright green, flashing circle lit up the area, Steve assumed was the magic-sounding, interdimensional zone. The green circle then started to grow, not shrink, spreading out further and further until it covered all of Lake Monroe. The teenagers, and the three creatures all watched in horror, then Jonathan closed his eyes and looked at the aquatic creature.

"The zone isn't closed...it's even bigger...and...and..."

"We don't know how to close this one..." Steve finished, looked at the sad face of the racoon. It cooed softly, then put its head on Steve's arm.

"We've lost..." Nancy muttered. Steve watched her a moment, then looked up at the monitor, stroking the racoon's hair.

"You might be right..."

"Something is wrong..." Will said, standing up on the boat and looking of the back. Their boating toady was finished, and the boys had a lot of fun. But now it was time to go back to the cabin. Or it would be, if not for that disturbing feeling in Will's chest.

"Will, what's wrong?" Mike asked grabbed his friend. Will looked over Mike, then looked back at the water behind them.

"That..." Will said, pointing. And Mike and Lucas saw it. Will knew they would, because something was horribly wrong. There, gliding along the water and following their vessel, was a thin creature, in the tatters of a green robe, with white skin and bright green eyes.

"Will..." the creature uttered as it moved closer. Mike and Lucas drew back from the edge and scooted back, toward the front of the boat, where Mrs. Wheeler, Mr. Wheeler and Mom were. But Will wasn't afraid. But he could see that the Lich was.

"Help me..."

"Only...if you help me first..." Will said defiantly as the Lich twirled and slid its way toward their boat.

6. Chapter 6

Here we go with the penultimate chapter. Hang on, because we're really going with the most exciting parts of Cabin in the Woods and Stranger Things and stuffs about to get crazy...

Chapter 6: Phase 4

"What's happening?" Steve asked, slamming his hands into the machine in front of him. As if in response, the words "PHASE 4" flashed over the map of the area, and then the green ring over Lake Monroe had turned red. Jonathan glanced at Steve, then back at Nancy. He'd just declared his love for them both. It looked like whatever was happening could destroy everything in a moment. He supposed it would be an okay time to die, though he would have liked to see his mother and his brother one more time. Then, an image popped into his head, of him and the aquatic creature (whose name was Hergon, as he'd shown Jonathan) running out of the building. It gave Jonathan a headache whenever Hergon put an image in his head and Jonathan shut his eyes, tried to make sense of it, then opened his eyes and looked at the aquatic creature standing on all fours next to him.

"Run? To where? Is something going to explode?" Jonathan asked, signaling to the machine. Then, the racoon started doing something with his hands, actions which Jonathan saw Steve could at least partially understand.

"Arena...bigger..." Steve said, then looked at the machine. Nancy caught on though, and snatched the fairy out of the air.

"What? The arena is bigger? It's expanded over this map! This covers the entire lake! What are we supposed to do..."

"Wait what?" Steve said, looking at the screen again.

"The red circle," Nancy explained, "It must have been the new arena size...which means..."

"You dumb idiots made the arena even bigger! That means my parents and brother are now in range of these monsters, doesn't it? Doesn't it?!" Jonathan grabbed the aquatic creature by the sticky pouches that were where its neck met its chest. It made the creature start to wheeze strangely as Jonathan shook the thing, but he was angry. Jonathan got an image of the various monsters running lose around the lake, and saw the Wheeler cabin destroyed by the kraken's tentacles grabbing the wood and pulling it into the water. Jonathan shut his eyes, though this time, it was more in terror than from the headache. Jonathan could see out of the corner of his eye the racoon started to move toward Jonathan, but Steve grabbed the creature's tail, pulled it back to him and snatched it up by the scruff of its neck.

"I told you we shouldn't have trusted this vermin. Look, we've only got one option that I think is going to work. Jonathan, you still have your radio, right? Call Eleven and Hopper and tell them we got an emergency..." the racoon turned and started to sign furiously at Steve. The boy watched the animal then snorted, "You're right its too late! You've created a mess that..."

"Is all we hoped for from phase 4..." Steve, Nancy, Jonathan and their three allies all turned to see Mr. Sitterson in the then open doorway of the mainframe. His suit looked disheveled and he was frowning, though there was a slight amusement in his eyes. He had some sort of glove on, some special thing that mostly black leather and metal and had glowing blue lights. And next to him...was the pale skinned creature with buzz saw blades sticking out of him. Its black clothing was tight around him, and his saws were dripping with blood. The creature's eyes were black orbs, and its nostrils flared slightly as the sight of the three humans and their counterparts.

"You...survived..."

"Why did this happen? Why is this lake a zone for...for..."

"Experimentation. Oh, you didn't think you three idiots stealing a key from me would be enough to shut down our arena, did you?" Sitterson said, "I allowed your vermin ally to have it, so that it could unwittingly initiate phase four. Now, this facility has fallen to madness...engineers and workers running from all manner of

monsters...and we will soon see which monsters are the most effective at killing the thing we hope to employ them on...people!" Sitterson said.

"But if you can't control it through the mainframe...how do you stop this arena?"

"You think I'm stupid? I'm not telling you how to shut down the arena..." Sitterson said, then closed his eyes and groaned in pain. Jonathan felt the aquatic creature touch his head and let out a deep wheeze, then Jonathan saw it. The shutdown sequence was at the center of the arena.

"You...you stupid creature!" Sitterson said, holding up his gloved hand, "Dr. Brenner will thank me for eliminating you three meddling kids! For, you see, only those with the power to control these things have any chance of surviving..." Mr. Sitterson thrust out the hand, then pointed slowly, "Now, saw man...do you worst to these three..." the orbs in the device grew bright white, and the fairy and aquatic creature both began to scream as the saw man looked at Sitterson, then nodded slowly.

"Yes..." it uttered, then turned to Jonathan and started toward him on two surprisingly fast moving legs. Its right hand had a saw going through its palm, between its index and middle fingers and it swung that as it rushed the boy. Jonathan jumped back, dropping the aquatic creature, which promptly rushed at the saw man's legs and knocked it to the ground. Nancy released the fairy, which sped over to the saw man, grabbed it by an arm and flung it back toward Sitterson who dodged with an easy step back, then held up his hand.

"You two are becoming a nuisance. Don't you know when to obey orders?" Sitterson said, holding up the device and causing the aquatic creature and fairy to fall in pain.

"No! Stop!" Jonathan said, grabbing Steve's bat and gritting through the pain in his bad hand as he moved toward Sitterson. The pain only worsened when the saw man jumped to its feet and threw out a hand to grab the bat, right on the nails, and seized the weapon before Jonathan could do anything with it.

"You know what to do saw man. Now, I have a business venture to explore..." Sitterson turned and went back down the hallway, while the saw man gripped the bat tighter and tighter, until the wood splintered and burst, sending nails and fragments flying. He dropped the broken remains of the bat and Jonathan scrambled back toward the two other teenagers.

"This is f*cking crazy..." Steve muttered, then Jonathan heard the coo of the racoon, and turned to see it pointing at one monitor. On the screen were the words "DIMENSIONAL BEING 16 – PALE SAW CREATURE" and underneath, "WEAKNESS – FIRE." Jonathan looked at it, then at Steve and Nancy and smiled slightly.

"We can do that..." Jonathan tried to summon the image of gasoline or some combustion fluid in his head, then looked at the aquatic creature, who cocked its head, then nodded.

"Steve, Nancy, I'll get something to lite it!" Jonathan said. Steve eyed him darkly, but Nancy grabbed his arm.

"We'll hold him off, but get ready as fast as you can..."

"I suppose we can hold their attention...I got an idea about that..." Steve said. The racoon cooed in confusion, then Steve rolled his eyes.

"Yes, I really have an idea! Follow me!" Steve rushed to the side of the room, where a heavy binder was sitting on a pedestal. Steve grabbed it and flung it at the saw man. It smacked into the creature's head, and it turned with dark cold eyes to look at Steve.

"That's right, you want me, come and get me!" Steve said, rushing for a side door. The racoon bounded across the room onto Steve's shoulder, and the fairy pulled Nancy after him. Jonathan and the aquatic creature turned down another hallway, no longer pursued by the saw man, and followed the pathway for some time. That was, until Jonathan saw what appeared to be a technician flung against a wall with several hundred newtons of force.

"Holy Jesus, what..." Jonathan started, then a cyclops, a one eyed, bald headed humanoid in black armor stomped out from the hallway and roared at the two.

"I'm starting to get the sense that the Greeks and Romans weren't just making sh*t up..." Jonathan muttered as he started to back away from the ten-foot tall monster. There was something that sounded like an enraged "*neigh*" then the cyclops was kicked by two powerful white hooves into the same wall it had thrown the man. The unicorn neighed again louder as it came into view and stabbed its horn into the cyclops's gut, holding it back. Hergon grabbed Jonathan and pulled him past the two monsters, who engaged in a vicious battle.

"The Unicorn...it's on your side..." the aquatic creature nodded, then turned a hard corner. Jonathan chased after it, and then stopped as they stood before the doors of a garage. Hergon raced between large trucks and vans to what appeared to be the door of a large storage closet.

"Alright..." Jonathan said, opening the door, and revealing several shelves of gasoline containers. He grabbed one, and felt that it was full to the brim.

"Yes...ha-ha...here!" Jonathan handed the aquatic creature two of the containers and grabbed two himself, fighting through the pain in his bad hand.

"Now, where do you think Steve and Nancy went?" Jonathan asked. The aquatic creature looked up, turning its head slightly, then barked and started to waddle toward a door, carrying the two containers. Jonathan followed, soon panting and sweating under the strain of the heavy gasoline, and as they pushed through a door that led to a staircase, Jonathan saw something that could have been a scarecrow flung down a stairway by a woman in security gear with some sort of strange, electric gun. The woman clicked the device off then on again, and held it up at Jonathan.

"Don't move..." the woman said, then Jonathan heard a low *hiss* and a long, large cobra jumped from behind her and bit into her arm, causing her to drop the gun. The snake's teeth sunk deep into her flesh, then started dragging her back. The woman's screams echoed down the hall as the snake twirled and pulled her away, and Jonathan swallowed hard and tried not to think about it as he snatched up her electric gun and put it in his belt. They followed up the trail of blood until they reached the third floor, and the aquatic

man pushed through a side door then barked loudly. Jonathan rushed through to see a long hallway. Steve and Nancy were on the opposite side, backing away from the saw man, who looked even more agitated.

"Quick!" Jonathan said, opening one of the containers and rushing to where Nancy and Steve were.

"About time, Byers!" Steve yelled, rushing to him and snatching a container from him. He doused the hall, cursing the monster in front of him. Jonathan could see that the racoon was still on Steve's shoulder, but the fairy was not with Nancy.

"Nancy, where...?"

"She's fighting it!" Nancy called, pointing. Jonathan turned to see the fairy buzzing back and forth around the saw man's face. The saw man growled and swatted at her, but was too slow to grab her. The aquatic thing barked behind him, and held up the gasoline and Jonathan began dousing along with Steve.

"Fairy! Come back!" Nancy yelled, but the fairy continued to fight. Jonathan eyed the creatures, then drew the electric gun.

"She not totally be able to control herself..." Jonathan surmised. Steve looked at the racoon, who nodded quickly, then pointed at its hand.

"That glove thing...that controls them. But not you..." the racoon cocked its head, then touched its scalp.

"BS, you're not too smart, how..."

"We don't have time Steve!" Nancy yelled, grabbing the last can of gasoline and flinging it down the hallway. Jonathan held up the electric gun and tried to fire it, but, with his bad aim and even worse luck, the only thing the shock hit was the fairy. The poor creature went flying past the saw man, and crashed into the back wall behind them. Jonathan lowered the gun, and looked as apologetic as he could to Nancy, Steve, the racoon and the aquatic creature. Nancy eyed him darkly, then snatched the gun and hit their opponent

straight on the buzz saw on his head. The creature jerked and shook for a few seconds, then roared in outrage and rushed the three.

"Good enough..." Steve muttered, taking out his lighter and throwing it onto the gas. The fluid erupted, and soon the saw man and all the hallway around him was covered in flame.

"Burn! Burn you monster!" Nancy yelled. The saw man, despite the fire, started to move again, slower, reaching out for the group with his buzz sawed hand. Nancy growled at it, then grabbed the last gas container and threw it as hard as she could at the saw man. The container burst on him and the monster erupted in flames. It cried out one high, horrible scream, then collapsed onto the ground lifelessly.

"We did it!" Jonathan said, smiling, "We beat it!" Then, there was the sound of something banging against the tiles of the ceiling above them. They looked up to see two tiles knocked out of place, and long, dead looking branches stretching out and grabbing the saw man from the flames. The fire seemed to have no effect on as the wooden finger-like extensions wrapped around the saw man's arms and legs and lifted him into the air. The wood creaked loudly, then started to pull apart, and after a few seconds, tore the saw man into pieces in front of the group.

"Jesus Christ!" Steve yelled. The wood seemed to hear this, as it dropped the dismembered saw man and turned to the group.

"Run!" Nancy yelled, then, the fairy, now seeming to have recovered, burst from the flames, zoomed to her finger and pulled her forward, back to the stairway. Steve looked at his racoon as it signed out a word, then looked back to Jonathan.

"The arena. We have to go back to the arena! Meet you there!"

"Got it!" Jonathan called back, then screamed as he was grabbed by the foot by a huffing aquatic creature and pulled through a side door and across another long hallway until they reached the big main atrium with the boxes and the arena. The aquatic creature dropped his foot then pointed forward.

"Ugh...I can still walk!" Jonathan murmured, then stood up on the

railing of the upper floor, looking down. There wasn't much down there, until a security guard in the full black armor came out into the hallway and touched his ear.

"I don't see anymore DBs nor those kids, Dr. Hadley. I'll do a sweep of the area..." Jonathan reached for the electric gun, but then remembered Nancy had it and sighed.

"Well, guess we got to do this the hard way..." Jonathan said to the aquatic creature, when he heard the sound of something big running, then turned to see a huge, ugly, hairless brown-green creature in a loincloth rush from his box and send the armored man flying with a swing of his hammer.

"Oh boy..." Jonathan muttered, as the ogre creature slammed his hammer into the man's back, then turned up to Jonathan and roared at him in anger. It started for the steps, but just then Jonathan was pulled to the ground by the aquatic creature. Hergon signaled behind them with a webbed foot, then Jonathan saw a giant spider on the ceiling, crawling quickly toward them and opening its fangs.

"Dammit!" Jonathan called, trying to stay down. The spider sped past them and flung itself over the railing, down onto the ogre. There was the sound of fighting, then Jonathan looked at the aquatic thing and nodded.

"The spider is on our side too! Sorta. Come on!" Jonathan hurried down the steps and rushed to the edge of the arena. They went through the small stands and the aquatic creature flung itself over the edge and rolled onto the sandy ground. Jonathan stopped at the edge, breathed deeply, then clambered over and tried to crawl down, falling the last few feet hard onto his bottom. He sat up, then hurried for the center of the arena, dropped to his knees, and started digging.

"What are we looking for?" Jonathan muttered, trying to dig in several points. An image of a metal box, then a metallic device flashed in his mind, then Jonathan shook his head, "There's not switch or box or anything..." the aquatic creature barked and look around. Jonathan stood up and then was grabbed from the back. He saw Nancy's hands, then turned to her.

"Nancy...you're safe..."

"You too...did you find it?"

"It's not here Nance..."

"What do you mean?" Steve asked as he dropped into the arena as well, "That what the water mind reader saw, right?"

"Yes...but..." Jonathan stood up and heard the sound of something big dropping into the arena. The three of them turned to see what at first appeared to be a lion, but as it roared, a goat head rose on its back and its tail turned toward them and opened a one eyed snake's mouth.

"F*ck," Steve said, as the creature approached them with a loud roar that actually started to produce flame.

Will stood in front of a long metallic trap door, at least, that was what he was sensing. The Lich and he were now connected, and he could sense into that dimension of colors and feelings at will. He had the Lich inside him, its soul, and its desperate hope. To go back into the Vale of Shadows and overthrow the Mind Flayer. And he and Will now had a pact...if the Lich saved Jonathan and helped destroy the interdimensional zone, he could use Will to open the gate to the Vale of Shadows. "A win-win..." Mike had called it. Mike was standing next to him then, and he put a hand on Will's shoulder.

"Ready?"

"Yeah..." Will said, looking back at Mike. He knew that because of the Lich's essence being in him, his eyes now had a green glint to them, but Mike pulled him in and hugged him anyway.

"Be careful..."

"I will..." Will said, resting his head on Mike's shoulder. Will looked to Lucas, who was actually smiling widely.

"Will the Wizard. Damn, Dustin is going to be so mad he missed this..."

"Yeah, you're right..." Will smiled at him, then turned to his mother, who had her terrified, concerned look on her face. She had a gun holstered on her hip and a big iron bar she was wielding as a weapon.

"Are you okay, Mom?"

"Will, honey, I talked to you through lights, went into a parallel dimension, and nearly baked you to protect and rescue you. I love both my boys, and I would anything for Jonathan too..." Mom pointed with the bar and growled, "Let's go find Jonathan and bring him home!" Will nodded at her, looked into Mike's eyes on last time, then turned and put out a hand. He felt the Lich's power pulsing through him, and then, the Lich's essence slid through his fingers into the ground around the door. Will felt locks turning and releasing, then drew a deep breath and pulled the essence back to lift open the door. It rumbled, moved dirt aside, then flipped up out of the ground and fell back, opening a ramp that led down into darkness.

"Come on...let's go..." Will said, letting the Lich's essence re-enter him and starting to walk down the ramp. Mike activated a flashlight and radio and followed Will. Lucas drew his wrist-rocket slingshot up behind Mike, and Mom brought up the rear, one hand on her bar, the other on the pistol. They did not go more than a few yards into the facility before two technicians came running down toward them and stopped in front of them. Mom pushed through the group and drew the pistol, causing both to put their hands up.

"Where's my son?" Mom roared, clicking the pistol's safety off. The two started to whimper, then, Will heard it. A whirring noise. There was a scream and a few gunshots, coming from a nearby side hallway, then blood splatted on the far side of the wall in front of them.

"Wha...what..." Mike started, but Will knew. He could sense the mecha-shark, and the creature wriggled its way around the corner, then opened its mouth and started whirring at them.

"Oh my god!" Mom said, started to stumble back. The mecha-shark roared, then whirred as it continued to wiggle forward. The technicians looked between the armed Mom and the shark and tried

to make a decision. Lucas drew back his slingshot, but Will knew that wouldn't be enough. He had to do this.

"Will, step back!" Mike yelled. Will shook his head, then let the Lich's power flow through him. He began to float a few inches off the ground, then held out a hand, and launch the Lich's power in a long, bright beam of energy. It zapped through the mecha-shark and blew a hole out the back of the creature. The thing growled slightly, began whirring in spurts, making the sounds of a machine breaking down, then dropped its head lifelessly to the ground. Will, still floating, turned slowly to the two technicians and held out a hand toward the open ramp.

"Leave!" Will yelled, speaking with both his own voice and the Lich's. The three nodded quickly and started running toward the ramp. Will sighed, then fell back to the ground.

"Will, are you okay honey...should we...should..." Mom started, but trailed off. Will looked at her and shook his head.

"I need to get the Lich's essence to his body...then, he can find Jonathan and the others..." Will took his mother's arm and stood, then pointed.

"Down that hallway, come on..." Will sighed, let the Lich's power return, then floated down to the hallway, around a corner, then around another. His mother and friends struggled to keep up, but it was okay. They were there to support him, but he was the one who had to do this. He made another turn and found a lab room. But Will could sense that beyond the far wall, the Lich's body was awaiting its essences' return.

"Move..." Will said, pushing tables, equipment and slain scientists out of the way, then hovered over to the metal wall, put his hands on it, and with three big breathes, blew the wall from its place and opened the way into the main atrium. Mom, Mike and Lucas caught up by then, and Will looked back for a second, then floated out to the main room and held up a hand to it, the actual Lich. The creature was even uglier than its essence, its torn green robe, and milk white, disfigured skin marked with signs of decay. The real Lich seemed as though it was in a coma, standing absolutely still and holding out a long, bony-

fingering hand up.

"There it is..." Will said, pointing with a finger at the creature. He felt the Lich's power swelling in him, then fired it, all of the Lich, into the creature's body. The real Lich shuddered, then its eyes burst open, and it looked down at Will.

"There...you've got your body back..." Will muttered as he gently dropped to the ground. Then, he heard his friends yell.

"Nancy!" Mike called. Will turned to see Mike was running for what appeared to be a railing overlooking a large, round sand filled pit. Will glanced back at the Lich, then ran over to where Mike was, and was soon joined by Mom and Lucas. From their place at the railing, they could see them, Steve, Nancy and Jonathan, facing down a three headed monstrosity. One that could breathe fire too, as Will saw the goat head on its back spew flame in anger.

"Jonathan!" Will yelled. His mother repeated it, then Lucas leaned on the railing and pointed.

"It's a Chimera! A real chimera! And Steve's trying to fight it!" Will could see that Steve was in front of the other two, raising his arms and trying to draw attention to himself.

"No!" Will called. The Chimera roared all three of its heads, then bounded for Steve.

"Steve, watch out!" Lucas called. As he leaned over the railing, Will saw something glint in his peripheral, then several huge slick appendages burst through the door on the side of the arena, and thrust out, grabbing the Chimera by its legs and body. The creature roared and blew fire, but the tentacles were unaffected and soon, the rest of the Kraken burst from the doorway and fell onto the Chimera, roaring and consuming the monster. The Chimera cried out and breathed flame based on the sounds Will heard, but soon was silent. The Kraken, however, was not finished and turned to Steve, Nancy and Jonathan.

"No! Jonathan! No!" Will said, rushing to the railing and jumping down. Just as he would have hit the sand pit hard, he felt the Lich

stop his fall, put him down gently, then the Lich floated in front of him and put out a hand.

"Help...Jonathan!" The Lich turned its body horizontal, started spinning quickly, then zoomed forward, slicing through the Kraken's long pointed head, and out through its beak and tentacles. The Kraken crashed forward, its tentacles sprawling lifelessly around it, and the Lich appeared behind the older teens, then flicked a piece of Kraken gut off his shoulder.

"Jonathan!" Will called, rushing around the dead monster and going to his brother. He heard their mother hot on his heels, and Mike yelling for Nancy behind her, then Lucas calling for Steve behind him. Will jumped and crashed into Jonathan, holding him tightly.

"Jonathan....you're okay..."

"Will! What are you doing here? What..." Jonathan looked up at the Lich, then back at Will, terror in his eyes.

"It's okay, he's a good guy now..."

"I should be more surprised...but honestly, I'm just glad..." Jonathan and Will were both grabbed by their mother, who threw her arms around both and pulled them into a close embrace.

"Jonathan..."

"Mom?"

"Nancy!" Mike yelled, jumping into her sister and probably intentionally knocking both of them to the ground. Nancy held onto Mike anyway and hugged her brother tightly.

"Thank God you're safe Mike..."

"You too, Nancy."

"Steve! My man!" Lucas yelled, rushing past the two and holding out a hand for a high-five. Steve gave it, then looked at Lucas and shrugged.

"Come here man!" Steve grabbed Lucas in a hug, then let him go and dusted him off. Then, Lucas jumped back from him.

"What is that?" Lucas demanded, looking at the racoon that jumped onto Steve's shoulder.

"This is the racoon that broke in the cabin and made all that ruckus... it's a really smart rodent. It knows sign language. And how to type..." Steve said, looking at it, "It can help us shut down this zone..."

"Zone? Nancy, is that...a bug?" Mike asked, looking at the creature buzzing around Nancy's face. She rolled her eyes.

"It's a fairy..."

"A fairy? A real fairy?" Mike asked, his eyes growing incredibly wide.

"Yep, she's been helping me..." Will watched the thing buzz around Mike for a few moments, then turned to Jonathan and the strange, blue, frog-like humanoid that crawled toward Will and Mom slowly.

"And this is Hergon...he's an aquatic water...man...thing..." Jonathan said, holding out a hand. The creature nodded to Mom and Will then barked.

"My God, um...okay. So, you've got some special monsters...that are helping you guys..." Mom said, gently, then rubbed her head, "Now, what do we need to do..."

"The scientists and businessmen here have created a... interdimensional zone..." Nancy said, trying to sound it out. Jonathan nodded

"The zone has been expanded to include the entire lake. As long as the zone is active, monsters like that..." he signaled to the dead Kraken and Chimera underneath, "Can be loose, and be destructive, to everything and everyone around the lake..." Jonathan said. Steve nodded in support.

"Aqua creature there can read minds, and he read in a particularly evil businessman's thoughts that the way to shut down the zone is in the center of the arena..." Steve said. Will looked puzzled, then

turned to where he could see someone had dug around in the center of the pit.

"We thought that it could have been in here, in the center of the arena but..." Jonathan said.

"But...it wasn't..." Mike said, going to Mom and taking the iron bar from her, "Look, this was the arena right?" Mike drew a circle in the dirt.

"Yeah..."

"But, the zone's expanded right? If those monsters were used like the Romans used animals, to fight each other for sport or entertainment or whatever..." Mike took the stick and drew the circle out, "Then maybe the next step is to have the fight over all over the lake..."

"Which means..." Nancy finished, leaning down, "The center of the arena isn't here, in the facility..." the racoon cooed, then jumped from Steve's shoulder and went to Mike's map. He began adjusting it, drawing a much more accurate map of lake Monroe, then drawing the large circle around it with a steady hand. It looked down, then turned to Steve and began to move its hands around strangely. Steve stared at it, then nodded.

"In the lake. The center is in the middle of the lake..." Steve said. The racoon nodded, then turned to the aquatic man who barked, then looked at Jonathan. Jonathan shut his eyes, blinked a few times, then glanced over the group.

"Hergon can't do that by himself. He's gonna need a human to help him..." Jonathan said. Will felt the Lich looked at him, then turned up to him.

"The Lich can help too. He's not affected by water...but, we'll need water suits Jonathan." The racoon signed to Steve and he groaned in frustration.

"Mainframe. As in, we need someone to run the mainframe at the same time..." the racoon nodded, then Steve turned to Mike and Nancy, "And let me guess, fairy, we've got one more thing you need

to take care of too..."

"No...Mr. Harrington...we only have one more thing to take care of..." a man in a dark black suit appeared at the railing of the arena, his face bloody and leather glove with glowing orbs on his left hand. Another man in a white trench coat and in thick glasses, was with him, however, he only put one hand on the railing as he only had a torn and bloody stump in place of where his left arm should have been.

"Mr. Sitterson...we destroyed your saw man and monsters wander the lab. Do you really want to try and stop us here?" Steve asked. Mr. Sitterson growled at him, then held up his glove.

"The saw man wasn't my only tool. We'll be getting rid of you once and for all!" Will looked at Jonathan, Steve, Nancy, his mother, Mike and Lucas, then turned back and flashed the man a smile.

"Ready guys?"

"We're ready buddy..." Jonathan said, speaking for the group.

"Then let's stop them!" Will said, pointing forward dramatically.

Jonathan watched in amazement as Will summoned the power of the Lich, the tall, green robed, green eyed milky skinned undead monster, and fired its power at Dr. Hadley and Mr. Sitterson. Sitterson jumped back, dodging the attack, but Dr. Hadley's slower move was not enough, and the Lich blew through his chest and left an index finger sized hole in him. The doctor gripped the opening, then collapsed. Jonathan frowned at his brother, who he hoped would take more pause in killing other humans, but he didn't have any time to reprimand him, as Mr. Sitterson held up his gloved hand and eyed them menacingly.

"You will pay for this! My plans will not be ruined! Now, you will face your worst nightmare!" Mr. Sitterson called. There was a loud roar, then the demogorgon appeared at his side and jumped down into the arena, opened its five part mouth and roared its numerous teeth at the group. Will, Mike, Lucas, and his mother all started to

draw back in terror from the demogorgon, but Jonathan felt strangely calm, and as he looked at a Nancy smiling slyly, and a Steve cracking his neck, he knew they had nothing to worry about. Jonathan put his hand on Will.

"Don't worry Will, we got this..." Jonathan said, then turned to his aquatic ally and thought of the gas container again.

"We'll need something to light it up. Get a couple of canisters for me..."

"Go with him fairy..." Nancy said, then moved to Jonathan's mother and drew the gun from her side, "I need this Ms. Byers, and if you don't mind, we need that bar too..." Nancy grabbed the iron rod and threw it to Steve who caught it and twirled it like a bat.

"Let's do this!" Steve yelled. Nancy stepped in front of Ms. Byers and started shooting at the demogorgon, and as it took bullets, it started to roar and bounded toward Nancy, only to be knocked in the head then side by Steve's iron bar. The creature retaliated, but Steve nimbly dodged its swipes, then Nancy shot at it again. The demogorgon looked between the two, then to Jonathan, who took out a lighter and held it up.

"Jonathan, no!" Mom yelled, but, as the demogorgon roared and rushed at Jonathan, he jumped aside, leaving the demogorgon to slam into the ground near him. It turned to roar at Jonathan, but then was being shot by Nancy and hammered by Steve. The demogorgon began to back away from the two, then saw Jonathan, holding his flame again. And this time, Jonathan had his back to an arena wall. The demogorgon roared, then rushed Jonathan. He smiled slightly, then put everything he could into jumping out of the way, rolling aside as the demogorgon crashed into the wall. It shook off the hit, then turned to see Jonathan moving quickly to stand next to Steve, who was still brandishing his metal pole and Nancy, who had her gun raised. The monster cried out in frustration, but before he could respond, Jonathan saw an image of the aquatic creature holding two canisters of gas. Jonathan clenched his teeth through the pain and imagined the aquatic creature flinging gas down onto the demogorgon, then opened his eyes to see Hergon moving to the seats over that part of the arena, then throwing one cannister over. The

metal crashed into the demogorgon, which roared in pain and frustration, then the fairy, buzzing in strain, threw the other over, and really drenched the monster in gas.

"For the last time, go away!" Jonathan called, throwing his lighter as hard as he could. Time seemed to slow as the fire twirled in the air, spinning toward the creature. The demogorgon turned back to Jonathan and roared with all its might, and the lighter flew straight into the things open mouth. Then, time stopped for a moment, as every stared at the creature, with the lighter in its mouth.

"Uh...that wasn't right..." Jonathan muttered.

"No sh*t Jonathan..." Nancy muttered, lowering her gun, "You got another lighter Steve?"

"I...somewhere..." Steve muttered, patting around his pockets. Meanwhile, Jonathan could hear the demogorgon choking and coughing, then it split open its five part mouth and dropped the lighter, which bounced harmlessly to the ground. It turned and let out one more roar, but Jonathan glimpsed something grey moving along the stands, then saw the racoon open Steve's lighter, flick the wheel, then drop it down, onto the monster. As the lighter hit the sand, it caused the gas drenched ground, cannisters and demogorgon to explode in flame.

"That works too!" Jonathan said, then pointed up to Hergon, who held up the his last cannister, "Finish this!"

"Do it aqua thing!" Nancy yelled as the burning demogorgon tried to crawl from the fire.

"Boom!" Steve called as the gas fell and caused even more flame to burst from the Demogorgon. It let out one final roar of pain, then dropped lifelessly to the ground.

"Yeah! We killed it!" Jonathan said, grabbing Nancy and Steve, who were smiling and laughing. Then, Jonathan started to move to kiss Steve, but the boy put a hand out, and looked to Will and Jonathan's mother, and Jonathan dropped his head in shame at his stupidity.

"Later..." Steve whispered in Jonathan's ear, "You can do a lot more than just kiss me..." Jonathan smiled, then turned to Will, who was looking over the stands above them.

"Mr. Sitterson is gone..."

"But our problems aren't. The arena is still running..." Nancy said. She looked at Jonathan, who nodded.

"The access panel in the middle of the arena has to be shut down. And I have to go with him..." Jonathan said.

"And the Lich...can move underwater as well..." Will reminded the group, "I'm coming with you Jonathan..." Jonathan turned to his mother, who shook her head and appeared terrified, but Jonathan put a hand on hers and smiled.

"Jonathan, I just got Will back. And you. I can't risk you and him going...and...and..." his mother said.

"I'm sorry, mom. But we'll be back...both of us...I promise. We found Will, we saved him from the mind flayer. Now, let us save you..."

"...alright...but I'm calling Hopper..." Mom muttered, gulping, "Be careful..."

"We will..." Jonathan turned as the aquatic creature barked twice, then, he got an image of full body wetsuits and oxygen tanks.

"Scuba gear, level two..." Jonathan said, "With lake access a few steps away..."

"What about the rest of us?" Mike asked. Steve eyed him, then held out a hand as the racoon crawled back onto his shoulder.

"I've got to get this thing back up to the mainframe...and some backup would be nice..."

"I've got you..." Lucas said, drawing his slingshot. Steve nodded to him, then Jonathan saw Nancy reached out and grabbed her brother's shoulder.

"Mike, as long as that corporate man's glove works, he'll be able to launch monsters at Steve and Jonathan. We've got to destroy that glove, and I've got an idea for how we might..." Nancy said, looking at the fairy who buzzed in support, "We're going after Sitterson..." Mike nodded in support, then Steve patted Jonathan roughly on the back.

"Good. Then I'll see you two on the other side..."

"Good luck Steve, and be careful Jonathan..." Nancy said.

"I will, and you be careful Steve..." Jonathan called.

"Hmph, fine, you too Byers..." Steve moved to the boy and put his arms around him in a tight hug. Jonathan felt Steve's warmth, and held him close, then slowly they let go. He could see Will, Mike and Lucas hugging too, then reached out and grabbed his mother's hand.

"Go with Nancy and Mike, they'll get you to the door before they go after Sitterson..."

"Alright...please Jonathan, no matter what..."

"Don't worry, I'll make sure Will comes home..."

"Well, yeah...but make sure you come home too!" Mom said, then grabbed Jonathan and kissed him hard on the forehead, "Be safe, please..."

"I will..." Jonathan said, then turned and looked at Will.

"Another adventure, huh buddy? Guess it's going to be a while before we go back to normal..."

"Jonathan...we were never normal..." Will said, then looked at the group, "None of us were...but this time, we're not weak, or being attacked or beat up. We're attacking, we're assaulting, and we're going to win..." Will looked to his brother, "We're heroes..."

"Yeah, we are..." Jonathan said.

Lucas wanted to say something to Steve so bad. About the various monster corpses they found as they ascended the stairs. About the intelligent racoon and the fact that the smartest of the allies picked the dumb Steve. Or, about the fact that Lucas saw him put Jonathan's thing in his mouth. But Lucas couldn't summon the courage to say anything to Steve as they passed through one blood slick hallway and stopped on the edge of another.

"Well, are we getting close to the mainframe?" Steve asked the racoon. It looked at him, took a few deep sniffs, then moved its hands around. The symbols satisfied Steve and he continued forward, but Lucas suddenly felt that they might die and he had to say something.

"So, you know racoon language?"

"I know sign language. I have a deaf cousin..." Steve muttered, "And this racoon knows sign language too. That's probably why it picked me, if you're wondering why the idiot Steve has a smart monster..." Steve paused and signaled to what appeared to be the destroyed exoskeleton of an enormous Hercules beetle, "And as for these monsters, well, Mr. Racoon and I let these creatures loose at the staff here, and it's turned into a blood bath...between mythical creatures and armed guards..." Steve stepped around what appeared to be a severed human arm and the crushed head of a giant snake, "It's kind've stressing me out, that decision and the consequences, so don't ask about it..."

"Fine...Steve...I just...I need to say..." Lucas trailed off, then shook his head, "I won't tell anyone, about what I saw. Ever. About..."

"You saw. Of course you saw. You had too, we were screaming and thrusting and..." Steve frowned then shrugged, "But, I should have known this wasn't going to work. I'm leaving Hawkins this fall. And next year, Nancy is going to college somewhere in New England, Jonathan to NYU, and me...I'm going to be stuck in Indiana forever..." Steve muttered, then pushed through another door and started down a new hallway, "I'm going to be the odd man out here, and no matter how I feel about either Byers or Nancy, nor how they feel about me...those two are better as a couple than I am for either of them..." Steve murmured, then stopped and sighed.

"But...they...with you..." Lucas started, trying to find the words.

"In the heat of the moment. And sure, both feel like they owe me something, maybe Nancy even did love me once. But Jonathan and Nancy are meant for each other. I'm meant...to be a good babysitter and maybe an okay worker..." Steve muttered. The racoon moved its paws and signed something, and Steve growled at it, "I know we have somewhere to go! Give us a minute!" Lucas sighed, then reached out and grabbed Steve's arm.

"Dustin thinks you are the coolest person he ever met. And...I...agree with him..." Lucas struggled, "And if Jonathan and Nancy can't make room for you in their lives...they don't deserve you..." Lucas was just talking, making things up, but Steve stopped moving, breathed deeply and wiped a tear from his eye as he heard this.

"I...thank you...now let's stop this sappy shit and save the day..." Steve started, then looked back at Lucas.

"Steve...wait...I didn't tell Mike. But I think Mike might be like you... because he's started talking a lot about Will and recently, touching him and hugging him and grabbing his hand..." Lucas trailed off and then shrugged, "He holds on to Will as often as he touches El these days. And Will...well, you see that he..." Lucas tried off and Steve raised an eyebrow.

"Talk more about this later and I promise I'll listen to you..." Steve said, then looked at his racoon, "But we've got a crisis to deal with. And Lucas, you promised. Nobody will know..."

"Nobody will know...though Dustin..."

"Nobody!"

"Nobody, fine, yes, nobody..."

7. Chapter 7

Chapter 7: Closure

Jonathan touched the helmet of the suit gently and then picked it up and put it over Will's head. It wasn't exactly like the scuba suits he'd seen in movies. But they would work...or at least, he hoped they would. They were in long sleek fabrics that wrapped tight around their bodies, with big, round helmets that went over their heads, along with flippers and a tank of what Jonathan assumed to be oxygen with straps like a backpack. He helped Will pull on his tank of oxygen, then plugged in the oxygen to Will's helmet. There was the sound of some air being released, then Will breathed deeply and shook his head in the positive.

"Alright, just a second buddy..." Jonathan turned and looked to his own pack and helmet, sitting on the wall on the side of the facility's wharf, which was a small grey building up against the water and with a ramp and stairs descending into the dark of the facility below them. Jonathan pulled on the oxygen, then put his helmet over his head and connected the two parts. After a few turns on his tank his own oxygen flow started, and Jonathan breathed and turned to see Will standing near the water, looking out over the dark waves. Jonathan, with his flippers on, waddled over to Will and put a hand on him.

"Are you okay?" Jonathan asked, though Will obviously couldn't hear through his helmet. At least, he shouldn't have, but Will's wide eyes suggested otherwise.

"Jonathan..." Will said, which was projected through Jonathan's helmet. Then, Jonathan understood why they had the bulky things on.

"These have radios..." Jonathan said, then grabbed for a knob on the device. He turned it a few times, then some buzzing came in, and he heard the sound of Steve arguing with his racoon.

"Why do you need backup access right now? There isn't anything for

us to do yet...don't you sign curse at me..."

"Steve..." there was a pause on the radio, then Steve's voice answered.

"Byers? Aren't you and your little brother supposed to be underwater? Why are you at a radio?"

"These water helmets have radios! Steve, I'm so glad I can hear your voice through this..."

"I'm glad I'm not just waiting for you to come back..." Steve paused, "I'm glad to hear your voice too..."

"Steve, I'm going to try and keep radio contact as we go down..." Jonathan looked at Hergon, who nodded quickly, then jumped into the water. Will looked to Jonathan and smiled.

"Ready?"

"For this to be over, and for us to go back to sitting around the cabin...or taking pictures in the house...yes."

"Me too..." Will said, then took Jonathan's hand, and the both of them jumped into the water. Jonathan saw in his peripheral the Lich follow, and soon they were following Jonathan's aquatic ally into the lake, toward the deepest and darkest part.

"Steve...are you there..."

"I'm here Byers..."

"I...Steve...I..." Jonathan bit his lip, glanced at Will, then sighed, "Be careful..."

"You too, Jonathan..."

Steve breathed deeply, then looked back at Lucas, who was spinning around in a rolling chair near one of the monitors. The racoon was typing something out and purring to itself in annoyance. Steve eyed them both, then activated his radio and leaned into the mic.

"Nancy, are you there?"

"It's me, Steve. I'm here!" Mike's voice shot through the radio. Steve rolled his eyes, and leaned forward.

"I want to talk to Nancy..."

"She's...uh...busy at the moment. She'll call you back...whoa!" there was the sound of something banging, then Mike's voice came back, "Everything is under control..."

"Have you found Sitterson?"

"Who?"

"The suit guy? The one with that...evil, magic glove?"

"Uh...no..." there was more banging, "We're looking for him, and we have a plan. I'll talk to you later...wait, Nancy, there!" the line clicked, then Steve was left back with his racoon and Lucas. Steve sighed, then turned to Lucas.

"You think he's...?" Steve started. Lucas stopped spinning just as he was looking at Steve and smiled.

"He really likes El. A lot. But also, especially since that thing took over Will, he's been real close and protective. And really tried to take care of him. And held his hand..." Lucas shrugged, "I'm not an expert on this stuff, but I'm also not blind..."

"No...but I think you might be the only one..." Steve muttered, then there was the sound of something banging, and a man screaming. Steve turned back to the door of the mainframe and grabbed his iron bar. He saw Lucas snatch up his slingshot and the racoon jumped onto Steve's shoulder with an annoyed coo.

"Alright, Lucas, ready?" Steve asked, glanced at Lucas who nodded. Steve flashed him a small grin, "Good, because I'm not," suddenly, the door of the mainframe was kicked open, and the unicorn strutted in, with Nancy and Mike riding on its back. Nancy's fairy was buzzing around her, and the unicorn neighed loudly as Steve, Lucas and the racoon stared at it in confusion.

"Where did he go?" Nancy asked, looking around.

"What...Nancy?" Steve asked.

"Where did he go Steve? He was running this way, I saw him..." Nancy muttered, looking around. Her fairy buzzed over to the racoon and the two started a heated conversation. Steve shrugged the racoon off him, and started toward Nancy.

"What do you mean? Who was running?"

"Sitterson of course! We had him..." Mike yelled. Steve eyed the boy, then, he saw some of the floor between him and the unicorn mounted Nancy started to vibrate, or shift or something. Steve might have thought that the circle in the floor became almost a liquid. Then, a girl with dark black hair, pale, white eyes and a long white robe rose from the floor and turned slowly to Steve.

"Uh...hello..." Steve said slowly. The creature opened it mouth, unhinged it, then roared at him, an ear-splitting scream that caused Steve to grip his ears and stumble back in pain. The creature drew back to scream again, but Nancy rode her unicorn headlong into the screamer, skewing it on the horn and slamming it into one of the monitors. The racoon cooed in horror, then the unicorn drew back and Nancy's fairy went in, smacking the screaming girl at various parts of its face and body. The screamer swatted quickly and sent the fairy flying. The monster then turned back to look at Steve.

"What did I do? Don't attack me!" Steve yelled, holding up his bar. The creature was about to scream again, but the unicorn reared and kicked the creature straight in the head, sending it into a nearby wall. Steve rolled his eyes, then looked to Lucas, who shrugged.

"Nancy did say she had a plan..." the screamer rose again, looked at the unicorn, then Steve, then hovered quickly through the door.

"Oh no you don't!" Mike called, holding his sister's waist as she turned the unicorn and rode after the thing, her fairy buzzing behind her.

"I bet she's dreamed of riding a unicorn since she was five..."

"I think Mike dreamed that too ..." Lucas murmured, then, he gasped

suddenly. Steve turned to see Lucas had a knife to his throat as the white-haired, green-skinned, goblin about half Lucas' size held him tightly. Another goblin, this one with red-skin and bright blue eyes appeared from a ventilation shaft and started laughing manically. Steve looked to his racoon, who signed quickly at him.

"Yeah...I thought it was starting to stink in here too. Hey, goblins!" Steve called, twirling his bar, "I'm who you want, remember? Sitterson wants you to kill me..."

"Actually Steve, I've changed my mind..." Steve turned to see a shadow on the wall start to shift, change, then fall away, and Sitterson appear, with a silvery, wispy creature floating next to him. He held up his gloved hand, which was damaged based on the fact that some lights were out, but not destroyed.

"Wha...what is that? And how are you controlling all these monsters?" Steve asked, backing away from Sitterson.

"Monster eletro-shock technology combined with miniaturized radios. Dr. Hadley, through long meticulous work, implanted most of these creatures with radio systems, and then I move my hand around, and give them a shock!" Sitterson shook his hand, and one of the goblins groaned in pain, "This is the master glove, but I have smaller models. Then, we train them like dogs in the arena. Walk forward, step back, speak!" Sitterson shocked the goblin again, causing it to cry out in anguish. The other goblin looked at its ally, then at Sitterson. It didn't seem to notice Steve backing up toward it.

"How did you implant that floating thing? Or the screaming woman?"

"My ally here we have named a ghoul, and its implant is in its physical form, which is still back in the container. The other creature, the banshee, is made of flesh and bone, just like us. She can, however, caused matter to shift to a liquid form and create soundwaves at decibels that were previously thought theoretical..."

"But, Sitterson, money aside, don't you see how dangerous this is? I mean, the demigorgon, the screamer... There was a tree which also seemed to like tearing people apart, and look, these are things. They are literally evil little creatures..." the goblins looked at each other,

then one started to grunt and point at Steve before it was shocked by a flick of Sitterson's wrist.

"They are under my control Mr. Harrington...as long as I have control, there is no danger..."

"I suppose...that's true..." Steve said, then turned swiftly and saw that the second goblin was no longer holding Lucas, but had its hands on its hips and was murmuring something.

"Uh...Lucas..."

"I'm good, me and goblin got a deal..." Lucas said. The goblin made a grunt in agreement, then tossed up a piece of metal, which Lucas grabbed and, in a smooth motion, leaned around Steve, drew back his slingshot and fired it at Sitterson's hand. It smashed into the center of the glove, creating a spark and causing the device to flash red.

"Wha...no...no..." Sitterson looked at it, smacked it a few times, then glanced up at the ghoul, which turned toward him slowly.

"Stop! Turn on them!" Sitterson said, holding up the device. It flashed a few times, then the ghoul screamed and disappeared.

"Dammit! No...!" Sitterson said. The goblin handed Lucas another piece of metal and took aim and hit the glove straight on, breaking more lights and causing it to spark further.

"You stupid boy!" Sitterson, drew a pistol. Steve tried to get in the way, but could not reach Lucas in time as he heard the first *Pow!* Lucas grabbed his chest, then breathed and started to feel around himself, then noticed that one of the goblins had taken the bullet for him. The other one went to the first side, let out an angry roar, then rushed at Sitterson. The man put a bullet in that goblin's head as well, then aimed back at Lucas, though Steve was now standing in front of him.

"...damn...alright, Sitterson, it's over..."

"No, no!" Sitterson cried out, then cocked the gun at Steve, but before he fired, the doors of the mainframe burst open again, then Nancy rode in with Mike, both screaming loudly. The unicorn slammed its

horn straight through Sitterson's gloved hand, causing the device to break down completely, and he screamed in anger and he tried to raise his pistol, but the fairy snatched it from him and buzzed away, leaving him exposed.

"My plans...my corporate empire..." Sitterson groaned, then, Steve saw the wall behind him started to vibrate, then the screamers hand reached out and grabbed Sitterson around the throat. Her head followed through the liquidity of the wall and she glanced around with dark glares, then looked at Sitterson with nothing but pure hate.

"No...no...no!" Sitterson cried. Then, the creature started to scream in his ear. It was real loud, and hurt Steve's ears, but it caused Sitterson's to start to bleed, his head fell back lifelessly before she pulled him into the liquid like wall and dragged him away.

"Yes! We did it!" Steve said, rushing to the unicorn and grabbing Nancy's hand. He looked up at her with a sweet smile, then eyed her brother who was grinning ear to ear from the back of the unicorn, "Mike, you see what you two can do when you work together?" Nancy looked back at Mike and smiled at him.

"We do make a pretty good team..."

"Yeah..."

"Want to go for a ride and round up the other monsters..."

"Yeah...let's go!"

"You ready, fairy?" Nancy asked. The creature buzzed at her, then at the racoon which waved it away and purred in frustration at the broken monitor in front of it. Steve waved at them as Nancy reared the unicorn, then rode out the door with his brother and fairy.

"Hmm...Dustin is going to be so mad he missed this..." Lucas muttered, "We should probably call the Byers..."

"Yeah...good idea..." Steve said, going to the radio and trying to make contact.

"Byers...you there..."

"Steve...thank God. I thought...you might be..."

"Nope. Nancy and Mike beat Sitterson...and there weren't any casualties..." Steve looked over the two goblins and sighed, "Mostly... Where are you guys?"

"We're getting close, about five minutes from the center of the lake..." Steve smiled and turned to the racoon.

"Are you ready..." the racoon kept typing quickly, then looked at Steve and started to sign. It was a long sentence and Steve was having a hard time follow.

"System, malfunction, weak, barrier, access, breakdown, new, opening..." Steve read out, then looked at Lucas.

"Did that make sense to you?"

"Not completely...but I think he's talking about that..." Lucas pointed at one of the monitors, which was displaying another circle forming near the middle of the arena. Steve eyed it, then saw the racoon was signing furiously. The same ten letters over and over again, and looking up at the circle.

"M-I-N-D-F-L-A-Y-E-R..." Steve uttered weakly.

"Jonathan!" Will heard Steve's voice through Jonathan's radio, and looked at him brother.

"Steve, what..." Will tried to wait for the message, but then felt something changing about the water. Something was sending up waves from the lake bottom near the other side of the lake. Will tried to see what it might have been, but he couldn't see much other than the small ray of light that was stretching out from his helmet. He turned to the Lich, which was floating next to him, and held out a hand.

"I need to see..." the Lich turned, and touched Will's hand, and Will suddenly saw the Lich in the cold, unchanging white, the circling bright purple of the aquatic creature leading them, and Jonathan in the similarly colored violet. But, beyond the numerous silver, grey

and yellow flashing forms of the nearby fish, he saw it. Small white spores, floating in the water. A strange, spiderweb like substance stretching up from the lake bottom. And the glowing red of...a new gate.

"The Vale of Shadows..."

"The Mind Flayer! It's broken into the interdimensional zone! Jonathan hurry!" Steve yelled, then the radios scratched loudly a few times, then went off. Will looked at Jonathan, then they turned and started swimming as quickly as they could for the center of the lake. Will could hear a roar behind him, then the light on his helmet started to blink.

"No...no...no!" Will yelled, swimming as quickly as he could. Jonathan had more leg than Will and was starting to get ahead when Will held out a hand and shut his eyes.

"Help me..." he whispered, then the Lich's' spirit was in him, and he started to glide smoothly through the water, past Jonathan and it only took him a few moments to reach the access panel. The device opened slowly, and Will put his hand on the sphere that started up the system.

"ACCESS GRANTED..." the device displayed in green. Will looked to the aquatic creature which caught up, then waited for Jonathan to finally catch up with the other two. The creature looked at Jonathan and held out a hand, which lead his brother to shut his eyes and shake his head. The radio buzzed a moment and Will could here Jonathan murmuring to himself again.

"I need to type? Okay...keep you hand there for a minute Will..." Jonathan started to tap keys slowly, muttering to him, "This one, then this...then this...then...what?" Jonathan shut his eyes, then nodded, "Okay...here..." Will could see that on the screen, INITIATE SYSTEM SHUTDOWN was highlighted. Jonathan moved the blinking pointer down to it, but as he was about to press the button, something sped through the water and grabbed his leg.

"Ahh!" Will turned to see that it looked like a demidog, though it had some differences. It had leaf-like wings, similar to a Manta ray, and it

was gripping and pulling Jonathan with its back legs and feet that ended in talons. The creature opened its five part mouth and sent out a roar through the water.

"No!" Will said, trying to swim toward his brother, but the aquatic creature was quicker, tackling the Manta ray demidog and pulling it back. Will turned to finished what Jonathan started, and reached out to hit initialize shutdown, when another Manta ray demidog sped through the water and attacked Will, opening his five part mouth right onto his helmet and biting into the glass. He started to panic and was pushed back in the water, then, he felt the Lich's power and held up a hand. The Manta ray demidog roared, then, there was a flash of white and the creature's upper two mouths started to float away in the water. It flapped the other three in pain, and tried to reach a talon edged foot for Will, but Will flicked two fingers down, and severed the appendage from its body. The creature started to swim away, but Will held out a hand, then closed it in the fist. Five white streaks in the shape of fingers closed around the Manta ray demidog and split it apart, leaving its remnants floating lifelessly in the water. Will sighed, then heard an enormous roar. He turned around slowly in the water and saw that it wasn't just a few spores anymore. Three huge, demoic, infectious smoke like arms of the mind flayer-that monster that had conquered and tortured Will so bad-burst from the ground and reached out for him, the thunderous roar sounding over everything and make Will's ears and head hurt. Will turned in terror and started to swim away, then the Lich slid through the water to float before him, separating Will and the mind-flayer. It held out its hands.

"You...die!" the Lich cried, and Will felt it yelled at the core of his being.

"Invader..." Will heard roared in counter through the water, then the Lich started firing beams of white while the mind-flayers arms tried to overtake the Lich. Will watched in horror, the light on his helmet buzzing and flashing, his mind and body feeling frozen in place. The monster's two arms battled the Lich, then the third arm turned for Will and stretched out for him, and Will felt like he couldn't move as it approached. Then, he was pulled hard by a foot and the aquatic creature, bleeding from a large wound to its side, dragged Will out of

the way. It continued to move, trying keep Will out of range, but the arm was approaching, approaching...Will screamed as loud as he could, but the aquatic creature flung Will down and thrust itself up, getting caught in the mind-flayer's grasp. The aquatic creature screamed and cried out, then a white beam destroyed part of the arm, and it broke up, leaving the aquatic thing floating lifelessly in the water. Will moved to it slowly, feeling tears forming on his face, when he saw three more mind-flayer arms burst from the opening. The Lich was struggling, fighting and zapping and roaring, but the arms overwhelmed him in a few moments. And it seemed over. Will stared in terror as those arms were sliding back through the water for him, ready to take him again, to use him, abuse him and turn him against everything he loved. Will closed his eyes, and tried to brace himself when he heard Jonathan scream through the radio.

"Steve! Shut down initiated! Get this arena out of here!"

"Got it!" Steve yelled back, then Will could hear a few buttons being pressed. Then, it was like an explosion going backward. A shimmering bright light started getting pulled back to a single point, near where Jonathan was floating. The mind flayer roared and reached for Will but as the light came in, the spores, Manta ray demidogs, and arms and hole disappeared. Soon, the light slid down to the panel next to Jonathan, and then...nothing. No sounds, except the heavy panting of Jonathan and the quiet sound of the lake water pressing against the helmet. Will closed his eyes, tried to reach out into that second dimension, to see the lights and desire and hearts of those around him. But he couldn't. He couldn't sense anything...except one thing...Will swam slowly, gently toward where the Lich had been battling the Mind Flayer, and found, buried in the sand, a crown. The Lich's crown.

"Jonathan..." Steve's voice asked through the radio, "The racoon's gone. And so is Nancy's unicorn and fairy..."

"The others are gone, mostly...but...I think Hergon was killed...before..." Jonathan swam slowly over to Will, who was holding the crown tightly.

"The Lich could have destroyed him. He could have destroyed the Mind Flayer if he had went through the portal into the other

dimension. But...it sacrificed itself...for me..."

"Will...We won...and we get to go home and tell mom...and Nancy, Steve, Mike and Lucas...that we were both heroes..." Jonathan said, grabbing Will's hand as they started swimming toward the surface.

"No, you listen...I'm tired of this bullsh*t. A secret facility of a weapons contractor, here on lake Monroe?" Hopper yelled at the government officials standing next to a man in a suit and jacket tried to calm down the angry sheriff. Ms. Byers was with him, smoking a cigarette and interrupting the government official with *My son almost died and my family was nearly killed*. Lucas was hearing this from outside the office, in a small waiting area with two benches. Mike and Will sitting next to him on the bench, while the opposite bench sat the two who came with Hopper, Dustin and El. Mike kept looking at El, while Dustin was holding Will's Lich crown and looked at the three again with a truly depressed look on his face. Max, Lucas knew, had decided not to come with Hopper, instead preferring to wait and see what would happen when her stepfather returned with Billy, who had apparently run away to the lake without properly informing their mother. Lucas still couldn't totally believe Hopper brought Dustin because he "needed some extra help," as Dustin claimed, but he was glad to have most his party back together. And Dustin was helping the group relive all the highlights.

"So, what happened after the magical Dungeons and Dragons..." Dustin asked, looking up the crown again.

"Do you really want to know?" Lucas asked, "You're going to be real sad you missed it..."

"I...no..." Dustin sighed, then looked up at Mike, "Tell me the part about riding the unicorn again though..."

"So...when Nancy and I started pursuing Mr. Sitterson..." Mike started. Dustin held up a hand.

"Mr. crazy glove control business guy in the suit. Yeah, okay continue..." Mike smiled, then looked at El.

"Nancy had the idea to use the monsters we could against him. The fairy or the racoon or one of them had figured out that some creatures were more easily controlled than others, and by devices implanted in them. The fairy was small and could remove other creatures control features, and so, when they found the unicorn, the fairy extracted the shock implant and the unicorn agreed to help us fight. Then...Nancy and I mounted it and she suddenly remembered the riding lessons she'd had when she was young...we rode it into the room with Steve and Lucas..."

"And skewered a banshee!" Lucas finished, "On a unicorn..." Dustin sighed again, looked at the crown, then up at Mike.

"That's a really awesome story...You couldn't have convinced your dad to take one more guy? Or Nancy to pick me?"

"Well maybe...but I think we might have died if we didn't have Steve..." Mike offered. Lucas nodded in agreement, then looked at Dustin.

"Next time we fight interdimensional monsters, I promise to bring you..."

"I don't need to come, but at least patch me in to the radio..." Dustin said, "Though, riding on a unicorn sounded really cool...and this crown..." Dustin put it on his head, and gave the others a wide smile. Mike and Lucas laughed, but Will seemed so morose.

"Will, we won. We took down the arena, and undid Dark Sky's plans, and stopped the Mind Flayer from taking over, again," Mike said, trying to cheer his friend up.

"Maybe..." Will offered, "But...the mind flayer could have been gone. Forever. The Lich...would have killed it..." Will leaned over and took the crown from Dustin, and stared at it again.

"But it saved you instead..." Lucas offered, "And I'd prefer that...We'll stop the mind flayer. I promise...but..."

"No, my life...it's worth the mind-flayers. I...I don't deserve to live instead..."

"No..." El said suddenly. That was the first thing she had said since coming with Hopper and everyone turned to watch her, "Friends don't lie. Friends don't die..."

"You're one to talk! When it came to destroying the demigorgon, you were ready to die!" Will yelled, "But I...I hesitated. I froze...and...now..." Will dropped his head and his eyes started to water.

"Will..." Mike stood up and put his hands on Will's shoulders, "Listen to me. Stop and listen..." Will looked down at the crown, then back up at Mike.

"I'm...listening..." Will struggled out, fighting back tears. Mike sighed, then rubbed Will's shoulders.

"Will, if we spend our time hating the bad guys or trying to hurt monsters, even if they are from the Upside down, we'll turn into monsters like the Department of Energy or Raytheon..." Mike gripped Will's shoulders tighter. Real tight, as Lucas noted, "But...if we fight not against, but for what's right, for our family...for our friends...for what we love..." Mike glanced at El, then looked back at Will, "If we do that, we'll win, and we won't end up falling to evil..."

"It's a good way not to fall to the dark side..." Dustin said, bouncing his eyebrows. Will and Mike looked at him, then both smiled and giggled.

"Fight for what we love..." Will said, smiling and looking into Mike's eyes.

"Fight for what we love..." Mike repeated, leaning closer to Will. Really close. Lucas jumped up and grabbed Mike's arm before the two boys ended up kissing.

"Fight for what we love...good slogan for our party. 'Include everyone' should probably be a rule too..." Lucas said.

"Okay, sounds good. Are we done Hopper?" Steve said, opening the door of the office and coming out with Jonathan and Nancy.

"You all are good. I'll finish up with these bozos. Head back to the cabin. I'll pick up El and Dustin later..."

"Or...Dustin could stay at the cabin..." Dustin said, smiling at Mike, who rolled his eyes.

"There are no more monsters to see Dustin, sorry. But I suppose we can squeeze in to Will, Lucas and my room..."

"Hey, boys...and El. Let's get out of here..." Steve said, putting his hands in his pockets. Jonathan and Nancy nodded in agreement.

"Will, Mom is going to ride back with Hopper, so we're taking you all home..." Jonathan said.

"I'm riding with Steve!" Dustin yelled. Lucas nodded.

"Me too! Unless..." Lucas looked at Will, who smiled.

"I'm okay Lucas....Mike, El, will you ride with me and Jonathan..." Mike smiled and nodded and El nodded as well.

"Sure Will..." Mike looked at Nancy, but Steve cut in.

"I lost rock paper scissors, Nancy is with Jonathan on this ride..." Steve muttered, then turned and put a hand on Dustin's back.

"Shotgun!" Dustin yelled.

"I'll see you back at the cabin Steve..." Nancy called, giving him a wide smile. Jonathan dropped his gaze, then looked up at Steve and gave him a small smile.

"See you later, Steve..."

"Don't miss me too much Byers..." Steve muttered, then put one hand on Lucas' arm, "Also...we got to talk...about our money..." Lucas looked up at him, then frowned.

"I...It's okay, I'll just..."

"Will cheated in that game..." Steve muttered, "You guys used the Lich to beat us..." Steve shook his head, "There is only one way for you to make this right...Rematch!" Lucas looked at Dustin, who started to smile and laugh.

"This is gonna be awesome..." Dustin said. Lucas raised an eyebrow then nodded.

"Fine, Steve...you're on..."

"Ready?" Lucas asked, putting the money into the 2 player Galaga arcade machine. Steve smiled at the boy, then looked to Jonathan and Nancy, who were standing to his right. Mike and Will were to Lucas's left, and Dustin and El were standing between them, trying to see.

"Winning side gets all the money...and gets to decide what we play for our last night..." Steve reminded him, then cracked his knuckles.

"Whatever you say..." Lucas said. The music started on the machine, then they were off. Steve tried as hard as he could, and put everything he could into the game. His fighter speed back and forth across the screen, shooting wildly and dodging one, two, three shots, then finally his fighter took out the rest of the group, then he heard an explosion. Steve looked to Lucas who threw up his hand and sighed.

"I can't believe I did that..."

"I...won? I won?" Steve asked, look back at the surprised Nancy and the excited Jonathan with a big smile.

"Yeah Steve!" Jonathan yelled, pulling Steve into a hug. He smiled, then put his arms around Jonathan. Nancy join in to the hug, then let go and gave a sly look at Mike, who was enraged.

"Lucas!" Mike yelled, then looked at Nancy, "Lucas, that was our easy win. Now me and Will have to do everything..."

"Sometimes life isn't fair..." Nancy said, stepping up to the machine, Steve stepped back and flashed a grin at Lucas.

"Don't tell me you let me win..."

"For seventy bucks, I swear I did my best..." Lucas said, then looked at Dustin, who raised his eyebrows.

"So...if you guys won, would I get to see some of that cheese, right?"

"Of course you would Dustin..."

"Then kick her *ss Mike!" Dustin yelled. Mike gave him a thumbs up, then looked at Nancy. Steve leaned in to her ear and spoke under her breath.

"You've beat him a thousand times already. Just beat him again...and I'll let you do whatever you want to me..."

"Try making that promise to Jonathan..." Nancy whispered back, then started playing. As with their previous faceoff, Nancy's fighter moved more efficiently, sliding back and forth and dodging much easier than Mike, who was cursing at his screen and trying to keep up with what was coming. Steve thought they might just win the fight right there, but then an alien ship came from the side of the screen and Nancy slid right toward it.

"Nancy, no!" Steve yelled, but it was too late. Her fighter exploded in pixelated fire, and Nancy groaned in frustration. Mike cheered loudly and high-fived Lucas, then Dustin, then turned to Will who nodded slowly and turned to Jonathan.

"It's us again..."

"I know..." Jonathan said, smiling, "Still no hard feelings..."

"No, Jonathan..." Will looked at his brother then at Steve, "You're my brother, and I love you...no matter what happens, or...who you love..." Jonathan's eyes grew wide, and he glanced from Steve to Nancy then to Will, who smiled.

"I bet that psyched you out, didn't it..." Will said. Jonathan's eyes narrowed, then he smiled slightly.

"It did. But I still love you for it, just as I would no matter if you were in love with your best friend..." Jonathan said. Will's eyes grew wide, and Jonathan let out a laugh. Steve didn't find what he was hearing very funny and was actually starting to stress about the fact that he would lose his mother's seventy dollars again, and so grabbed Jonathan's wrist and pulled him to the machine.

"Byers...I don't ask for much..."

"I got this, Steve..." Jonathan said, putting a hand on Steve's shoulder. Steve eyed the room, then grabbed the hand, gave it a squeeze, then put it on the joystick and took his place next to Nancy.

"Come on Jonathan!"

"Win it for us Byers!"

"Come on Will!" Lucas called.

"You got this!" Mike said, putting a reassuring hand on his arm.

"Win that cabbage!" Dustin yelled.

They played hard, Will and Jonathan, jerking the joystick, slamming their buttons, screaming and yelling, and, as before, the arcade in Monroe seemed to gather around the two in this final epic confrontation. Steve cheered, a lot, and loudly, and grabbed Nancy's hand and held on tight as they watched this final battle. Then...just as Steve was sure Jonathan was about to lose...Will, Lucas, and Mike all yelled out in anger. Jonathan froze, as did Steve and Nancy, then they glanced at each other and started laughing loudly.

"We did it! We won!" Steve said, "You did it Byers!" Steve said, giving Jonathan a hearty slap on the back.

"Yes! Go Jonathan!" Nancy yelled, grabbing his hands and hugging him tightly. Steve watched them for a few seconds, then looked at Dustin who was now standing in front of Steve.

"I was cheering for you guys the whole time. I'm not with them..."

"I bet..." Steve said, ruffling Dustin's hair, "Ahem...boys..." Steve said, holding out a hand. The three younger teens turned, grumbling and took out the money, \$20 to Jonathan, \$40 to Nancy and \$70 to Steve.

"Thank you very much..." Steve said, putting his money back in his wallet.

"Okay...so what's the second part..." Mike asked, looking

downtrodden. Nancy answered.

"Second part?"

"Yeah, the second part, you get to decide what we do tonight..." Lucas muttered. Steve eyed him, then glanced at Jonathan.

"What do you think Byers? What are going to do the last night?"

"I don't know, Steve. What do you think Nancy?" Jonathan asked. Nancy looked at them both, then at Mike.

"There is a game we've played before. A board game...with special, magical characters...and dungeons..."

"Dungeons and Drogans?" Jonathan asked, with a sly look on his face. Will grabbed his brother's arm.

"Dungeons and Dragons..." Will said.

"Are you serious?" Mike asked, his eyes growing wide. Lucas and Dustin both looked at each other in excitement.

"Dungeons and Dragons, yeah, let's play. But I'm having a drink, and so help me, if one of you tells a single adult..." Steve started, but all four boys drew their fingers across their lips to indicate their silence.

"Alright, go get into whatever car your riding, I'll order some pizza for us..." Steve muttered, then flung his keys to Dustin.

"I call shotgun again!"

"Oh no you don't!" Lucas yelled, snatching the keys from Dustin. Mike and Will started to leave, then Will turned back and looked at his brother.

"Jonathan...can you come here...actually, Nancy and Steve, can you come too..." Will asked. Jonathan, Nancy and Steve looked at each other in confusion, then the three followed Will out of the arcade to the open air, where Will led them to the side of the building.

"Will, buddy, what..." Jonathan started, but then Will turned back,

and smiled at his brother.

"Jonathan...Nancy...if you love Steve...you need to show him...or you might lose him..." Will said, then walked past the three. They all stared at him in horror, and Steve felt frozen, and it took him a long time before he felt like he could move again.

"How...did he..." Nancy started, but trailed off for lack of words.

"The dimension...it let him see...our thoughts and hearts..." Jonathan surmised, pinching his forehead, then he looked up at Steve.

"I..."

"I understand you two..." Steve said, putting his hands in his pockets, "It was fun. I enjoyed it. I like you both...hell, I love you both. But I understand that you love each other, and I won't weigh you down. Have your great senior year together, explore the world and follow your passions, and don't worry about me...I'm the third wheel..." Steve looked down and kicked at the pavement. He saw Nancy struggle to form words in front of him, but he didn't expect Jonathan to grab him and press him into the building wall and smash his lips into Steve's.

"You're not the third wheel...You're the third part..." Jonathan said leaning back, then pressing his lips even harder into Steve's. Steve felt his eyes flutter close, then let his hand trace through Jonathan's hair. As Jonathan pressed into him, Nancy leaned in to Steve's ear and began to stroke his arm.

"He's right. You're the third part of us...You're the part that knows what their doing with life, the dedicated strong hero, perfect with children, and the steady companion and friend Jonathan or I can always find when we come home..." Jonathan let go for a second, breathing deeply and gripping Steve's jacket, then let Nancy slip past him and kiss Steve just as hard and just as passionately. They locked lips for a while, then Nancy finally let Steve go, and he looked between Jonathan and Nancy. The two people he loved.

"Fine...let's give this a try..." Steve said. Jonathan leaned forward for more, but Steve put up a finger to stop him and smiled, "You know,

my mom called yesterday...turns out...I got a cousin with a cabin too, one up at Michigan City, on the Great Lakes...and we've got it for the week, though my parents will be at a conference in Chicago for most of it..." Jonathan and Nancy looked at each other, then at Steve, who smiled widely.

"This one is a lot smaller. Other than my parents, it only has room for three...and we'll have to share a bed..."

"Sounds like we'll have to squeeze into that cabin..." Steve turned as he heard the voice, then looked to see Lucas smiling and bouncing his eyebrows. Jonathan let go of Steve's jacket, and Nancy put her hands on her hips. Lucas and Dustin were smiling widely next to each other.

"Were you listening to us?"

"No..." Dustin said, "Just that last part, about a cabin. Why were you so close to him, Jonathan..."

"Don't worry about it..." Steve and Jonathan said at once.

"We won't. But we will have to plan logistics..." Mike said, putting one arm around Will and the other around El, "We'll need to convince our parents we're gone for a while, Nancy. And make sure Holly doesn't hear about it either..."

"And I'll really need an excuse, pssh...I haven't been home in so long..." Lucas muttered.

"We can say you're visiting me. Our mom will cover for us..." Will said, signaling to Jonathan.

"We're never going to get time away from then..."

"We'll find time..." Jonathan said quietly. Nancy grinned at Steve.

"Besides, you're the perfect parent, taking care of these guys another week will be no problem for you," Nancy said. Steve eyed her darkly for a few seconds, then turned back.

"You two are lucky I love you..." he muttered quietly as he went to the cars, following the kids as they began to chant *"Cabin in the*

Woods II!"

Thanks for joining me on this journey. I had so much fun writing this and really appreciate any comments and suggests you may give!